

BINARY REBOOT

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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BY

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Abstract

CREATIVE PROJECT: Binary Reboot

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My final creative project involved the production of a short narrative film titled *Binary Reboot*. The film is a sequel to and/or expansion of other films I have produced and screenplays I have written during my time in the digital storytelling program. As such, the film is not only a standalone piece, but also functions as a part of a shared fictional universe I have created. This paper discusses influences on the project, provides a review of literature on topics that the film thematically addresses, outlines the production process involved in making the film, and provides concluding thoughts on both the film and contemporary storytelling in general.

Introduction/Description of Project

My final creative project, a short film titled *Binary Reboot*, has a few places where numbers are a part of the story. Like any self-respecting practitioner of homage and allusions, I tend to call upon various iterations of the numbers that were central to the plot of the television series *Lost* (Abrams, Lindelof, & Cuse, 2004) during those parts of the story. But going forward in my creative work, there is a new number that will weave its way into my storytelling: 1,408. That is the number of different items and elements currently showing up in the project's Premiere Pro library panel. I remember being amazed when the number was around 800. But it just kept growing. I begin this essay with an anecdote about numbers to offer a metaphor about the way the project evolved beyond my expectations.. This essay attempts to reflect on the project by discussing the artistic and theoretical influences on my work and by discussing what I learned during the production process. The essay provides an overview of the film's storyline, discusses some key influences on the project and on my storytelling, examines relevant scholarly literature, discusses the production process, and offers some concluding commentary on the project.

Narrative Overview

Binary Reboot follows two storylines, one set in present day involving a hacker and one set in the eighties involving a masked vigilante. The central character in the film is a hacker named Jamie Shaw. She is a "hacktivist" who uses technology and surveillance to carry out vigilante justice. *Binary Reboot* is the third film in a trilogy that began with a short film I produced during my first semester in the program. That film, *Control and Delete*, introduced Jamie via the story of an encounter between Jamie and a target who had made ill-gotten gains through unethical uses of technology. A film I produced during my second semester in the program, *Hover State*, provided some backstory about Jamie and ended with her turning herself into the FBI in

exchange for their help in finding her best friend, Monica, a mob heiress who had gone missing. *Binary Reboot* picks up immediately after the events of *Hover State*.

Jamie's storyline in *Binary Reboot* primarily involves the use of technology and, while there is a speculative or heightened tone to how she uses technology, her actions are generally grounded in what is possible through our current understanding and use of science and technology. The film's B story, however, hints at more supernatural or pseudoscientific elements through its focus on a serum capable of raising the dead and through a revelation near the end that time travel is an element of the B story.. As such, the film as a whole reflects a broad, more comprehensive approach to thinking about technology and science. After all, what Jamie is doing in present day would have seemed like the stuff of science fiction or magic 30 years ago. So the more supernatural elements present in the B story could perhaps not be so fantastical someday.

As the film begins, after the cold open and opening credits, Jamie is trying to persuade FBI Agent Jo Anna Cooper to help find Monica, who seems to have disappeared, or, as Jamie says, seems to be "nowhere." Before they can reach any agreement on the matter, Agent Cooper is pulled away because a human trafficking ring she is investigating is making a transaction. Jamie realizes Agent Cooper is headed to the wrong address and will not be able to stop the transport of a group of human trafficking victims in time. So Jamie is forced to find someone who can get to the right address on time. She somewhat randomly chooses Chloe Casper, a timid young woman who is hopelessly unable to exert any control over her own life.

Chloe is actually the first character the audience meets, as the cold open and opening credits focus primarily on how technology interrupts her attempts at self-improvement, archives and reminds her of her failures, and ultimately sends her on a life-altering journey. These seem to me

to be metaphors for how technology has influenced, and continues to influence, the lives of many people and we see a certain trajectory in domesticating technology in Chloe's story arc.

For both Chloe and Jamie, the story's inciting incident occurs when Jamie sends Chloe on a kind of odyssey to rescue the human trafficking victims. Chloe encounters a variety of obstacles along the way, each one allowing her to symbolically confront some element of her life or past that prevents her from self-determination. Jamie, meanwhile, begins to understand the human impact of her often stark, brutish, task-oriented use of technology. On a metaphoric level, Jamie learns something that perhaps those who let well-intentioned political crusades on social media wreck relationships have not learned. The film is about both Jamie and Chloe's journey. And really both are protagonists in their own right while simultaneously serving as each other's antagonist.

The avoidance of a traditional protagonist/antagonist structure in the story was definitely intentional. So much of the motivation for this story comes from my own view of technology's role at this specific moment in history. And, to my mind, we have gone way too far in excessive, extreme valorizing or vilifying of people and ideas, thanks in large part to technology. The clear "bad guys" in the film, a group of human traffickers, are purposely and intentionally an afterthought. They exist simply to drive the story forward and to provide a ticking clock. I feel in this particular time and discursive context, anything more with a villain is just reinforcing our current bad habits with narratives and storytelling. Anything more with a villain and the audience is either going to love them or hate them. We have had enough of that.

That is not to say, however, that the story does not lean into some more classical archetypes about heroes and villains. The film's secondary storyline, involving Monica and a masked vigilante, is perhaps a little more traditional in its approach to heroes and villains. Monica is a

mob heiress who has a history of bullying and who sees violence as her first and probably only option to solve problems. She is the closest thing the film has to a traditional villain. But she is also provided a path to redemption. The story does not resolve whether she chooses that path or not. That narrative choice is also intentional. To my mind, if she clearly chooses to mend her ways within the confines of a half-hour film, then we have the kind of neat and tidy ending that is problematic on multiple levels. But if she clearly rejects a chance at redemption, then she is the kind of unredeemable villain that we seem to think everybody is these days who disagrees with us on any one particular thing. And I just have no interest in that approach to morality in real-life or in fiction.

When Monica is unable to achieve her goal of finding a serum that raises the dead, she enlists the help of Cara, a young woman who fights crime as a masked vigilante called Jesus Girl. Just as the Jamie character has been featured in two other films I have produced, both the character of Cara and the larger mythology of the Jesus Girl persona have been featured in screenplays I have written in other classes. As such, Cara/Jesus Girl provides a way to develop a shared, fictional universe or, to put it in more academic terms, engage in world building within my work, which is another central goal of the project.

Just as there is tension between Jamie and Chloe, there is tension between Monica and Cara. In Monica and Cara's case, it is based in a childhood history with each other. Specifically, Monica bullied Cara when they were younger. Cara, however, ultimately chooses to help Monica and to offer her a path to redemption. Further, Cara looks to solve problems by means other than violence whenever possible. She is developed as a more classical hero, something of an anti-antihero. I felt such a character was necessary to balance Monica's villainous tendencies, Jamie's

over-the-top approach to vigilantism, and Chloe's initial victimhood. Cara sort of corrects the character flaws in the other characters.

So the story is about conflict between two pairs of women, thus we see an allusion and a kind of meta-allusion to binaries in the title. The dynamic between Monica and Cara mirrors the dynamic between Jamie and Chloe, with Cara and Jamie's roles being somewhat synchronous, but with Monica and Chloe needing very different kind of help from the heroic characters they encounter. Visually, the film emphasizes links between Jamie and Cara at various points and the film ends with the implication that Jamie is on her way to becoming the latest in a line of young women to take up the Jesus Girl persona. I would also note that I envision Cara as Jamie's birth mother. This is not alluded to in *Binary Reboot*, but it is suggested in one of the screenplays involving the Cara character that I wrote in another class. For the larger mythology of which the film is a part, such a plot point introduces other narrative elements as well, such as parent/child relationships and legacies. I see the idea of parent/child relationships in particular as a way to deal metaphorically with potentially technological themes like copying and reproduction.

Characteristics of Contemporary Cinema, Television, and Society in Creative Project

The primary inspiration for the character of Jamie is Harold Finch from *Person of Interest* (Nolan, 2011). Felicity Smoak from *Arrow* (Berlanti, Guggenheim, & Kreisberg, 2012) is another important influence on Jamie. These characters and others in contemporary media demonstrate the evolution of the hacker from a rogue criminal to a productive, often mainstream, type of character (Coleman, 2017). To me, this evolution reflects important societal and cultural shifts in the way technology is represented in popular culture. Technology has moved from being the domain of "nerds" to an omnipresent, mainstream, even hegemonic force in contemporary culture (Lane, 2018). Of course, we are potentially mindful of these aspects of technology when

we rely on our phones for information or seek an automobile with advanced safety features. We are also coming to terms with the impact of technology on politics. But beyond those obvious examples, we can also point to the rise of analytics in sports (Brefeld & Zimmermann, 2017), the use of advanced technology by supposedly archaic, anti-Western terrorist groups (Semati & Szpunar, 2018), the proliferation of artificial intelligence as personal assistants (Carman, 2018), or the use of so-called “big data” to drive policy in everything from education, to business, to politics (O’Neil, 2016) as other important ways technology permeates our world.

Technology, then, is changing how we know what we know. And I do not think television and film in particular have kept up with this trend in their storytelling practices. Certainly there are notable exceptions, as this essay will outline. But take, for example, the recently canceled television series *The Exorcist* (Slater, 2016). The show ran for two seasons with disappointing ratings (Roots, 2018), considering the iconic source material on which it was based. The series was essentially a sequel to the groundbreaking 1973 film *The Exorcist* (Blatty & Friedkin, 1973). The series did offer a contemporary, technological inflection through storylines where demonic possession was caught on video and spread virally. But it did nothing to integrate technology into demon hunting (or the existence of demons, for that matter). What a rich metaphoric and narrative playground to waste in favor of just having more priests throwing water around and chanting in Latin. I played with this notion of linking contemporary technology and ancient spirituality in a story I wrote in a screenwriting class in the English department that attempted to reimagine the Bloody Mary character as an A.I. The link between what was seen as “supernatural” years ago and what can be explained by technology today seems an obvious place to go to me and one still rich with potential for horror and suspense precisely because of the social impact of technology. But contemporary storytelling does not seem quite able to make that

link just yet. The feeling that this kind of thing was missing from contemporary storytelling was the motivation for my desire to at least include some sense of the supernatural or pseudoscientific within a story that is otherwise a very contemporary examination of tech vigilantism.

Indeed, the way both *Person of Interest* and *Arrow* feature characters who utilize technology in pursuit of vigilante justice is a key influence on my storytelling methods. I think contemporary popular culture is much more adept at executing stories about tech vigilantes and this type of character will probably mark the next wave in popular entertainment. Shows such as *Black Mirror* (Brooker & Jones, 2011), *Westworld* (Nolan, 2016), *Mr. Robot* (Esmail, 2015), *Scorpion* (Kurtzman & Orci, 2014) and *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre, 2007), all serve as examples of recent shows that have popularized stories about characters that use technology in ways that reflect (positively or negatively) a vigilante or activist attitude.

I am also heavily influenced by the recent trend toward television shows that examine the history and evolution of technology and the effects of technology on culture. Shows such as *Stranger Things* (Duffer & Duffer, 2016), *Halt and Catch Fire* (Cantwell & Rogers, 2014), the *Black Mirror* episode titled “San Junipero” (Brooker & Harris, 2016), *The X-Files* revival (Carter, 2016), and *13 Reasons Why* (Son & McCarthy, 2017) all serve as examples of this trend in various ways. Indeed, this trend is itself an expansion of various postmodern narratives from the past twenty years or so that examine the historical and contextual influence of various types of cultural narratives or technological developments, and this type of storytelling has influenced me as well. Some important influences in this vein include *The Ring* (Parkes, MacDonald, & Verbinski, 2002), *Scream* (Conrad, Woods, & Craven, 1996), *Supernatural* (Kripke, 2005),

Cabin in the Woods (Whedon & Goddard, 2012), and various television/streaming shows and films that have taken a meta approach to familiar characters and tropes.

Of course, many of the influences listed here involve male protagonists. This is particularly true with respect to shows or films about hackers or technological innovators. In this regard, the evolution of the “tech hero” seems to be following a trajectory similar to that of other character types. In essence, the guys get to go first. Probably no one thought much about this system of narrative development when, say for example, the character of the obsessive hunter of things that are not human was becoming codified via Abraham Van Helsing (Stoker, 1897) or refined via Fox Mulder (Carter, 1993). And, of course, the gender politics of superheroes are problematic on numerous levels with Batman and Superman existing for over forty years before Batgirl got popular because she was shot and paralyzed (Moore, 1988).

Gender in television and film, however, has undergone a somewhat rapid, if contested, transformation over the past two or three decades. As such, there is reason to believe we will not need to wait as long for female characters, or even creators to play a role in the development of narratives about tech heroes. A story like the one told in “San Junipero,” the importance of a character such as Felicity Smoak within an entire fictional universe, or the evolution of Barbara Gordon from a victimized, crippled Batgirl into the proto-hacker character known as Oracle (Cocca, 2014) suggest that the role of women in stories about technology could be historically different.

I am particularly interested in entering the creative conversation about gender in the media as it pertains to female heroes and protagonists. The evolution of female protagonists in television and film has been in arguably a state of nearly constant evolution since the seventies, and perhaps even before (Lotz, 2006). From workplace protagonists such as the characters of

Murphy Brown and Mary Tyler Moore (Dow, 1992), to revolutionary female music video performers (Lieb, 2013), to shows about female law enforcement officers (D'Acci, 1994), vigilantes (Kramer, 2017), and superheroines (Waites, 2017), the changing roles that women play in mediated texts is one of the richer areas of gender study over the past few decades. Indeed, a review of the Netflix series *Gypsy* (Rubin, 2017) discussed the show in terms that suggested the development of a female antihero archetype (Hogan, 2017), and the character of Nyssa Al Ghul from *Arrow* has also been discussed in a similar vein (Ingliss-Arkell, 2015). Further, recent scholarship is also becoming interested in how women are moving into important behind the scenes roles such as writers, directors, or producers (Lauzen, 2017). Of course, not all portrayals of women are positive, or even subject to a clear interpretation one way or the other, and some critics feel that the portrayal of women in television and film has not improved much over the past few decades (Cipriani, 2015).

Two of the most influential characters on my storytelling are Buffy Summers from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997) and Dana Scully from *The X-Files* (Carter, 1993). Buffy and Scully also reflect a more contemporary shift with respect to the types of stories and characters discussed in this essay. Buffy, after all, dislodges the Van Helsing-esque demon hunter from being the exclusive domain of masculinity. Scully, meanwhile, serves as the voice of reason and science that balances Mulder's obsessiveness.

Scully, then, is a kind of proto-tech/analytics/big data character who simply existed a little bit out of her time. It is also easy to forget how influential the character of Dana Scully was (and is) culturally. The notion of a woman acting as the cool, calm, counterbalance to a sometimes raving lunatic, bark at the moon type of male character was itself revolutionary at the time (Wakefield, 2001). Indeed, scholars have noted what they call the "Scully effect," which demonstrates how

the character influenced many young women in the nineties to pursue careers in science, medicine, and technology (Lane, 2018). So, while I tend to think of the Jamie character in terms of a “tech Buffy,” the truth is she owes just as much, if not more, to Scully. And while the character of Cara exists more in a world that seems similar to Buffy’s world, I also show that she has an awareness of science, reason, and the need to avoid violence and other superhero clichés when possible. As such, she is also a blending of Buffy and Scully.

Literature Review

As someone who came to the digital storytelling program with a background in both academia and production, my approach to thinking through and conceptualizing the project did not begin with images of shot lists or camera angles dancing in my head. Rather it began by thinking about my experiences and interactions with a series of academic themes that have either permeated my scholarly history or that I have developed an interest in during my time in the program. I believe each of these themes is relevant to digital storytelling. These themes are: fourth wave feminism, the effect of technology on culture, nostalgia, and fictional world-building. So my approach to digital storytelling is probably decidedly different from most students in the program. Certainly much of the work I have seen from others in the program or in the department is technically superior to what I am currently capable of producing, and much of it is very creative and unique. However, there is, at least to my mind, a lack of scope, resonance, and texture in much of it that I feel may stem from the creators not focusing substantially on broader, more comprehensive themes derived from understanding the link between storytelling and culture.

Of course, this does not have to be taken as a criticism, though I fear it reads like one. I am simply articulating where my interests lie, how they are perhaps distinct, and how they emerge

from a particular intersection between storytelling and culture. And my interests do not necessarily lie in the perfect shot, perfect lighting, or even navigating the stunningly masochistic film production process in general. Rather, my interests lie in telling stories that allow me to think about topics and themes that could also be investigated in scholarly, or at least socially conscious, work.

I also see reflections of the four themes I have chosen to examine in various contemporary popular culture artifacts. Series such as *Westworld* (Nolan, 2016), *Black Mirror* (Brooker & Jones, 2011), and *13 Reasons Why* (Son & McCarthy, 2017) serve as examples of contemporary popular culture texts that run the gamut of gender, world-building, the discursive potential of the past, and the impact of technology (Seitz, 2016; Brassett & Sutton, 2017; Harris, 2017). As such, I believe the themes I am attempting to tie together fit into a general model of contemporary storytelling. I feel my interest in all four demonstrates the compatibility of my scholarly and creative approach with current trends in digital storytelling and media studies.

Fourth Wave Feminism

As my discussion of gender in popular culture in the previous section perhaps suggests, I have an abiding interest in portrayals of feminism in the media. In particular, third wave feminism has always been particularly useful to me because of its presence in popular culture and media texts (Shugart, Waggoner, & Hallstein, 2001). From television series revolving around female protagonists such as *Ally McBeal* (Kelly, 1997) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997) and the rise of such characters to iconic status (Moseley & Read, 2002; Gorton, 2014), to critiques about the representation of women in news media (Bronstein, 2005), to complex and contradictory notions about female sexuality in popular music and fashion (Whiteley, 2000), to the movement's alignment with queer culture and its simultaneous influence on popular culture

(Shugart, 2003), the third wave feminist approach has remained highly influential because of its specific attention to the intersection of gender and the media. Certainly other issues are relevant to third wave feminism. But, for the purposes of this project, the movement's complicated and revolutionary articulation via (and sometimes in spite of) mediated texts is the most salient.

That link between third wave feminism and popular culture also provides a way to understand the transition to fourth wave feminism, and it is this newest wave of feminism that I find particularly useful to this project. Fourth wave feminism takes a variety of issues that were relevant in the third wave and expands them or gives them more contemporary inflections. For example, the third wave's alignment with queer theory has evolved into the fourth wave's focus on the transgender community (Bettcher, 2014). The fourth wave also seems to react somewhat against the general third wave debate over representations of the female body.

Third wave feminism dealt with debates about whether Ally McBeal's skirt was too short (Cohen & Riback, 2003) or whether the character was too thin (Grey, 2006). The movement responded in mixed fashion to how unique it was to see an attractive, petite blonde with the decidedly feminine name of "Buffy" exact retribution on a variety of "monsters" that stood as metaphors for the patriarchy (Early, 2001). Further, third wavers struggled with the simultaneous glorification and repulsion associated with the overly sexualized "midriff" archetype that dominated popular music, fashion, and other contours of popular culture as the nineties gave way to the new millennium (Levy, 2005).

Third wave feminists certainly had some issues to work out with respect to their attitude about representations of the female body and female sexuality in the media. The fourth wave pivots this issue somewhat with its desire to combat phenomena such as fat-shaming (Baker, 2015) and slut-shaming (Tanenbaum, 2015). A focus on a "body-positive" approach to feminism and

gender (Engeln, 2017) and a particular resistance to accepting “toxic masculinity” as a fatalistic norm (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016) highlight other ways the fourth wave distinguishes itself from the third wave while tackling some of the same broad social issues related to gender that guided the complicated third wave agenda.

Indeed, it is always difficult to take any “wave” of feminism and distill it down to a summary of ideas. Like its three predecessors, several values and tenets of fourth wave feminism seem very contested even among the movement’s self-professed adherents (Munro, 2013). Generally speaking, though, fourth wave feminism is linked to technology and how digital culture has altered women’s experiences and their capacity for activism (Cochrane, 2013). Indeed, some fourth wave feminists have gone so far as to speculate that online, digital spaces are the most important terrain for the movement (Schulte, 2011). This is an important concept because it establishes fourth wave feminism as both a specific part of digital culture and a corrective to the historical narrative of technology as a masculine pursuit (Pechtelidis, Kosma, & Chronaki, 2015).

In this context, the character of Jamie is very much conceived as a specifically fourth wave character. She is skilled in the use of technology and uses it for activist purposes. Activism is an important part of the fourth wave feminist agenda (Mendes, 2015), however the movement’s reliance on technological spaces has led some to criticize its capacity to foster actual real-world activism (Darmon, 2014). As such, I felt it important to create a character that clearly and directly uses technology to bring about actual change.

One critique of fourth wave feminism is that its contested and diffuse ideological nature can pit women against each other (Chamberlain, 2016). This is, of course, perhaps not so much a problem of any brand of feminism as much as a manifestation of the broader problem of using

technology to harass others (Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016). In this way, we see a link between gender and technology that demonstrates how these themes are not separate scholarly concerns in contemporary contexts. Still, such an issue problematizes fourth wave feminism. I have tried to symbolically play out this concern of fourth wave feminism in my story by crafting multiple narratives where interactions between female characters evolve from combative or confrontational to reconciled and supportive. Specifically, I try to articulate this theme in the film through the use of split screens. Sometimes characters are shown in split screen as a way to visually represent their relationship to each other at a given point in the narrative. Further, some characters, particularly Jamie, are shown from multiple angles in split screens to emphasize complex, contradictory, and evolving identities and psychological states.

Effects of Technology on Culture

I have already referenced how technology has moved away from being a primarily masculine pursuit. One of the primary reasons for that has to do with the ways in which technology has made interaction, collaboration, and connectedness the norm on social media (Baym, 2015). Some scholars see these trends as embodying more “feminine” modes of communication (Astrom & Karlsson, 2016). While such a claim may be an oversimplification based on stereotypes, it does seem safe to say that hypermasculine communication styles (Scharrer, 2001) do not reflect the ways that social media encourages relationship formation (Chambers, 2013), affective self-disclosure styles (Papacharissi, 2015), and relationship maintenance (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012).

Social media has also shifted ideas about emotional intimacy (Dunn & Nisbett, 2014), self-presentation (Van Elteren, 2013), the nature of cross-cultural relationships (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014), and a host of other interpersonal, social, and relational concepts (Fuchs, 2014).

That is not to say, of course, that social media has altered society and culture for the better. That is a matter of debate that is beyond the scope of this project. But the impact is undeniable. And, of course, all this says nothing about the way digital technology has altered the relationship between media consumers and content.

Burgess and Green (2009) offer a foundational account of YouTube as a prominent and influential disruptor in the media landscape. With its emphasis on participatory culture, digital curation, vlogging as an aesthetic form, and challenging media industries, YouTube has reshaped the political economy of the media and the expectations of consumers. Media studies scholars are also coming to terms with the ways in which streaming video services such as Netflix and Hulu have fundamentally altered the television and cable industries (Schweidel & Moe, 2016). Finally, Roh (2015) looks at how digital media forces us to reexamine ideas about current intellectual property laws.

This is merely a flyover list of the ways in which digital technology has altered the media landscape. My story addresses these themes both in the ways characters interact with each other and the way they find technology to both impede and foster agency. This theme is most directly articulated in the way the Chloe character interacts with technology. When we first meet her, technology symbolically “interrupts” her as she tries to prepare for an important meeting. Further, when we see her looking at documents and e-mails that discuss her place in the company she works for, we are not just getting story exposition. We are also seeing how technology makes permanent our failures or our victimizations and reflects them back at us. Here, Chloe is stifled and kept in a cycle of non-agency by digitization. And when Jamie targets her, technology becomes a serious threat to Chloe.

Of course, the story has a happy ending for Chloe, but she begins in a rather dreary place. Perhaps precisely the kind of place some scholars prophesized as contemporary technology began its rise in the latter part of the 20th century. Postmodernists like Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Guattari, writing in a generally pre-digital era, foreshadowed several issues relevant to the relationship between technology and culture. Baudrillard's discussion of the rise of artificial signs (simulacra) in an era of mass-produced culture speaks to a variety of concerns we see in the digital era. Chief among those concerns: the fear that people would lose the capacity to distinguish between the real and the artificial, an outcome termed *hyperreality* (Baudrillard, 1981). It is not difficult, for example, to see our contemporary political climate of "post-truth" discourse (Glasser, 2016) and the refusal of some to hear arguments outside their own echo chambers (Jacobson, Myung, & Johnson, 2016) as manifestations of a world where the "real" is not acknowledged if it conflicts with our artificial constructions of "reality." Indeed, the term "fake news" seems to imply a naming mechanism to deflect or challenge objective data.

Some conditions of the production process provided me with the tools to play with this theme even more directly than I had originally planned. For starters, the actress playing Jamie was so physically consistent in her performance from take to take, that I was able to make very liberal use of Jamie in split screens or from different, jarring angles. This stylistic move allows me to disrupt the narrative in a way that points to its construction via technology. It is really just basic formalist film and editing techniques (Giannetti, 2018), but in a digital era such an approach within a story about technology provides a means to think about levels and layers of reality, truth, and the impact of technology in deciding what counts as both.

Further, a significant portion of the dialogue between Monica and Cara had to be reconstructed through ADR due to a variety of circumstances. This means that their dialogue is

much clearer and completely free of ambient sound. In other words, it sounds less natural and more digital. And since their action takes place in a different time period, leaving it with minimal alteration seemed to be both an effective use of irony and a way to distinguish their narrative context as something more directly constructed by technology. When it is revealed near the end of the film that both have time traveled from the present day to the eighties, we see that, in fact, their storyline is more intensely technological and scientific. So I feel the less authentic sounding dialogue works in Monica and Cara's storyline. Just as both Monica and Cara sound more digital, both also arrived where they did through some kind of technological manipulation.

Jamie and Chloe exist in "our" world and time. Monica and Cara certainly do not exist in our time and, as such, perhaps do not exist in our world exactly. Indeed, once I saw the purposefully antiseptic, clean feel the sound in the Monica and Cara scenes were taking on, I wished I had just gotten all their dialogue via ADR. It is worth mentioning, though, that their scenes without ADR involve Monica coming to terms with whom she is and what she has done, so there is a kind of return to reality implied for her, which fits the shift to a more natural sound. But the use of dialogue and sound in the Monica and Cara storyline clearly reflects an attempt to play with ideas involving simulation and hyperreality.

Baudrillard's work on simulation and hyperreality has been applied to a variety of digital era concepts, moments, and problems such as the rise of the world-wide web (Poster, 2001), gaming culture (Coulter, 2007), contemporary film (Constable, 2006), and the use of media and technology by the terror group ISIS (Artrip & Debrix, 2018) just to name a few. Still, the general postmodern agenda of embracing irony, rejecting absolute truths, and turning a skeptical eye toward movements focused on social progress (Williams, 2000) seems at odds somewhat with digital politics, even as the movement so clearly accounts for some of the outcomes of the digital

era. For example, social justice warriors have recently lambasted the television show *South Park* (Parker & Stone, 1997) for its refusal to abandon its detached, cynical, “too cool to care” ethos in the current political climate (Bradley, 2017). It is ironic that two key categories of postmodernism (its breakdown between the real and the artificial and its rejection of “sincerity”) seem to be somewhat at war with each other in the digital era.

Or maybe it is not ironic. DeLeuze & Guattari offer insights into the relationship between machines and culture that perhaps demonstrate that tension and conflict is inherent in a digital age. The concept of the rhizome (DeLeuze & Guattari, 1980), with its focus on non-hierarchical structures, multiple interpretations, networks, and webs of meaning, has been used to account for the internet and its complex and contradictory influence on culture (Buchanan, 2009). Further, Deleuzian concepts such as assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) and its focus on fluidity and exchange of information (DeLanda, 2006) or nomadic essence with its focus on freedom from systems (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) suggest contexts of digital culture that seem both beneficial and problematic. It also seems as if the concept of the war machine (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) as a grass roots, networked group coalesced into an entity for the purpose of avoiding state control seems a useful model for coming to terms with some trends in politics during the digital era (Newman, 2009).

Nostalgia in Popular Culture

Reynolds (2011) notes that nostalgia is a common and logical outcome of popular culture, media, and technology. Indeed, scholars have been discussing the ideological and political dimensions of nostalgia for multiple decades with Jameson (1991) and Hutcheon (1988) carving out distinct stances about the relationship between politics and nostalgia in postmodern culture. For Jameson, nostalgia is decidedly ahistorical and apolitical and functions as a kind of example

of Baudrillard's simulacra. Hutcheon, meanwhile, takes a more optimistic tone, imbuing nostalgia with political and social potential. Further, Hutcheon seems to understand the inevitability of nostalgia by noting that, ironically, Jameson is "nostalgic" for a pre-pastiche, pure approach to history. Both have something to offer in understanding the evolution of nostalgia. Jameson, in particular, clearly anticipates the contemporary tendency of popular culture to mimic styles of the past. A show like *Stranger Things* with its capacity to imitate eighties films seems like it would be for Jameson, to keep with the plot of that series, some monster from the Upside Down.

Jameson is also concerned about what this type of simulation of the past means for norms of discourse. What he fails to recognize is that simulating the past *is* the new norm, or at least *a* new norm. With the capacity to archive everything, simulating the past is no longer a concept that is limited to the *Stranger Things*-esque imitation of old films, television, or music. Rather, media texts can draw upon their own pasts or have those pasts reflected back on them, and this relies on the continued existence of simulations of these original shows and films in the form of DVD's, streaming video, reruns, etc. Reboots of *The X-Files* (Carter, 2016) or *Gilmore Girls* (Sherman-Palladino & Palladino, 2016) are possible because the originals were never unavailable and, as such, never lost cultural currency thanks to mass reproduction. This was not necessarily the case in Jameson's time. Further, when those shows return, they are inevitably compared to their original iterations for better or worse. So the continued existence of these shows provides a context for constant evaluation and re-evaluation, a decidedly political and historical agenda.

Some popular culture artifacts have also been around long enough that they have a deep rhetorical history of their own to account for. The previous discussion about *South Park* and its relationship to contemporary politics serves as an example of this. Some have also taken the

occasion of the revival of *The X-Files* to note the show's lack of female writers or directors during its original nineties run (Desta, 2017). And of course there is the *Roseanne* (Barr, Carsey, & Werner, 2018) reboot and all the hand-wringing it has caused among critics for doing the very thing it was once glorified for – being contrarian and representing what its star sees as realistic portrayals of the middle class (Ohlheiser, 2018). Further, the revelations about Donald Trump's potential admission of sexual assault during a conversation with Billy Bush can be seen as an articulation of the link between simulations and rhetorical histories, as the preservation of a simulation of the incriminating conversation led to those revelations. Recent criticisms and re-evaluations of filmmakers who worked with Harvey Weinstein also arguably fall into this category. These kinds of interventions of artifacts from the past into contemporary issues might not have been possible in a pre-simulation, pre-nostalgia era.

In addition, examples of reboots move nostalgia beyond Jameson's feared and dreaded pastiche because reboots do not compile multiple sources so much as they refine a limited number of pre-existing sources. The new *Gilmore Girls* after all, was not a *Stranger Things* style mash-up of multiple sources. Rather, it was a focused extension of a singular series. This is something other than pastiche. Certainly, Jameson's idea of pastiche still exists in popular culture. But it is no longer the only kind of nostalgia in popular culture. Indeed, one could argue pastiche is no longer the dominant form of nostalgia in the media. As such, digital culture seems to have moved nostalgia somewhat away from pastiche and toward critical engagement. So, to the extent that the purposeless mixing and matching that Jameson lamented is apolitical and ahistorical, then the move beyond that type of discourse potentially offers a corrective to Jameson's concerns about nostalgia. In other words, Hutcheon is right about the potential of

nostalgia, while Jameson seems to have just cast it in terms of a world that was probably already practically gone even by the time he was writing.

Certainly, nostalgia in popular culture is an extremely fertile area of study. And while several ideas related to nostalgia in popular culture influenced my film, it would have been impossible to directly articulate them all. I did, however, set out to specifically play in a sandbox that is kind of a mix of *Stranger Things* and “San Junipero” by focusing on placing aesthetics from the past within in a highly technological environment. In particular, the soundtrack to the film relies heavily on synthwave music, a contemporary genre of electronic dance music that attempts to emulate the sound of eighties film music for the purposes of recreating the *experience* of watching an eighties film (Lambert, 2016). I felt such an approach not only fit the narrative themes of my film (time travel, simulations, technology, etc.), but also provided a particular stylistic approach grounded in academic ideas about postmodernism.

Of course, discussions of nostalgia in popular culture as it existed in Jameson and Hutcheon’s day is limited precisely because the scope and tone of nostalgia is changing drastically. In a digital age, analyses of nostalgia have tended to focus on recycling content and styles from the eighties and nineties as the first generation of people born with the internet moves toward middle-age (Okrent, 2017). Diving deeper into nostalgia in a digital era, we can even see the beginning of what might be termed internet nostalgia: a fondness for revisiting the aesthetic forms of early web sites in spite of the supposed gaudiness and inefficiency of those conventions (Cross, 2017), even as minimalist approaches to web design and web content continue to dominate the technology industry (Stark & Crawford, 2015).

Most of these concepts derive from traditional understandings of nostalgia as something that functions at a kind of intersection between human nature, ideology, and the media industries

(Fritzsche, 2001). Television (Niemeyer, 2014), film (Monk, 2011), and radio (Roessner, 2016) have each put their particular spin on nostalgia, after all. So too has new digital technology. The rise in participatory culture has, among other things, made it possible for consumers of media to digitally curate media content from the past according to their own agendas (Burgess & Green, 2009) and share those digital curations with the public via social media (Gans, 2016). Further, advances in streaming technology make it possible to have constant and more affordable access to vast libraries of old television, film, and music content (Lotz, 2014). This means nostalgia never really goes away and never really needs to evolve from one era to another.

My decision to juxtapose the past with the present in my film, and to suggest a relationship between the two, is also an attempt to focus on interconnectedness between the past and present. This is an attempt to challenge and correct the concerns many postmodern scholars have about nostalgia possibly detaching the past from its real political meaning and context (Kellner, 2016). I also rely on the story of an original superhero character that has a thirty-year history in an attempt to highlight how some newer characters from various action, adventure, and science fiction genres have themselves become subjects of nostalgia. And having Jesus Girl reappearing in 2018 after a two-decade absence is an allusion to the idea of “reboots.”

The evolution of nostalgia to incorporate popular culture artifacts that straddle the line between the “contemporary” and the “past” demonstrates a narrowing of what counts as nostalgia and points to an interesting gap in understanding nostalgia in the digital age. This section’s discussion of internet nostalgia offers some foundational thoughts on how to deal with this shift. If technology alters such fundamental concepts as time and space, reality, and attention spans, which diverse scholars as far back as McLuhan (1967), Baudrillard (1981), and Postman

(1985) have all suggested in varying ways, then it stands to reason that the pace for moving into the realm of nostalgia will quicken.

Scholars in varying disciplines are coming to terms with how the internet is impacting our senses, thought processes, socialization, and brain function (Carr, 2011). It stands to reason, then, that the manifestations of nostalgia in an era dominated by film, television, industrial control of media production, and all the hallmarks of a postmodern era were markedly different than we will see, and are already seeing, in an era dominated by interactivity, social media, and over-the-top delivery and creativity. Recent examples from the world of politics demonstrate just how much more narrowed and sped up the timeline for nostalgia can become. Memoli (2017) notes that nostalgia for the Obama era is already taking hold and even being commercialized. Further, May (2017) expresses something between horror and disdain at what he sees as a rising tide in nostalgia for the Bush era, while Graham (2017) argues that Democrats are even nostalgic for Bush. Bush is less than a decade removed from office, while Obama was president less than two years ago.

In a digital environment, nostalgia is no longer confined to a certain quantity of time passage. Nor is it confined to a discursive or narrative style that has gone away and needs to be revived. Rather, nostalgia becomes a way to account for political or social identity. This concept applies to popular culture and perhaps explains the trend toward what seems like newer and newer shows and films trafficking in nostalgia. Further research into nostalgia in popular culture needs to become dislodged from politically skeptical, postmodern perspectives and instead focus on the psychological, technological, and cultural contours of nostalgia. Nostalgia also perhaps needs to be understood more as a way to register a grassroots reaction to contemporary forms of discourse. Some elements of internet nostalgia can be seen, for example, as reactions against the

minimalist trend in web design (Meyer, 2015) and the political implications therein (Rodriguez, 2017). This has perhaps always been the case with nostalgia. But in a digital environment, it is no longer necessary to wait for creators of popular culture to decide what counts as nostalgia. With everything available from anytime, audiences have the capacity to intervene. When this happens, nostalgia narrows because more recent popular culture texts are available and can be positioned as relics of “the past” inasmuch as they differ from the present.

Again, we see the complexity and depth of nostalgia in popular culture through these discussions. My film really just sets the stage for my broader explorations of the link between the past and present in my creative work. As I mentioned previously, the connectedness between Jamie and Cara is further explored in another screenplay I wrote. Also, Jamie’s origin as a hacker is explored in two other screenplays I wrote in other classes. These stories take place when Jamie is an adolescent and a teenager so these etiological tales about Jamie position her past as a key part of her development. While I was not able to specifically allude to these events in my film, I did make some aesthetic choices about Jamie’s appearance that reflect nostalgia. In particular, Jamie’s wardrobe and hair is heavily influenced by fashion from the nineties and early aughts. In my timeline of events, the character was born in 1993 and began hacking around 2004. So I attempted to visually represent her in present day in ways that allude to both these key origin points, thus providing visual references to nostalgia and the past for the character.

Fictional World-Building

Gender, the impact of technology on society, and even nostalgia are all decidedly academic concepts that obviously have applications in many diverse fields of study. But my project is also concerned with a topic that is much more directly tied to digital storytelling and media production. Many of the influences on my work that I have discussed in this essay have also

engaged in what Jenkins calls *world-building* (2006). This process involves using multiple narratives and/or platforms to create a fictional world that is more expansive and interconnected than a single narrative or character. More contemporary language, or language more based in the media industries, might also refer to this kind of construct as a shared fictional universe (Wils, 2017).

Jenkins is arguably the father of the scholarly study of world-building and constructing fictional universes through his use of the topic within the context of studying transmedia storytelling and grassroots creativity (2006). According to Scolari (2013), *expansion* and *compression* strategies are also key components of world-building. *Compression* strategies involve efforts to sum up, restate, or summarize key events or plot points within the narrative. The process ideally involves creative ways to reintegrate previous material without it bogging down a story or seeming like an information dump and then using that as a jumping off point for a further elaboration of the narrative. This elaboration that follows is termed *expansion*.

I have also found one concept from literature to be quite useful in my project even though it is not explicitly a concept derived from scholarship on world-building. *Hint fiction*, sometimes conflated with the concepts of microfiction, flash fiction, or “Twitterature,” is a recent literary trend that embraces stories that combine brevity with larger suggested narratives (Smartwood, 2010). While there is no shortage of critiques to be made (academic and otherwise) about the possible pitfalls of whittling discourse down to such bare bones, some scholars have noted that these kind of stories can actually spur imagination, interest, and audience engagement by implying a larger, deeper, more mysterious story (Galef, 2016).

In this context, the term “hint fiction” is most useful to describe this kind of fiction, regardless of the specific length of any narrative. It is also a strategy I use repeatedly in my story. There are

numerous places in the script where characters deliver lines or have exchanges with other characters that suggest larger, more far-reaching stories that exist in their own right. And, as I have mentioned, *Binary Reboot* is just one of several stories involving a suite of characters, institutions, and situations that overlap and recur. There is the present day Jamie trilogy of which *Binary Reboot* is the culmination. There is also the *Jesus Girl* trilogy written primarily in a course within the Telecommunications Department that outlines the origin of the Jesus Girl persona, details Cara's fate (which is alluded to in *Binary Reboot*), and sees Jamie don the Jesus Girl costume for the first time. And there is the aforementioned pair of screenplays written in a class in the English department that features a young Jamie as a budding hacker. Most of these stories, or situations and beats within them, are alluded to at least briefly in *Binary Reboot*. Also, several characters, institutions, or contextual elements are lifted from some of the other stories. This approach allows me to apply various concepts related to world-building and to attempt to simultaneously embrace such a textured form of storytelling while also trying to offer a sufficiently entertaining standalone story. This has always been a challenge for any serialized stories or narratives that have some kind of underlying mythology (Brinker, 2018) and it is only exacerbated when attempting to develop a fictional universe. Yet such an approach to storytelling is so central today that it seems necessary for creators to learn about it. Indeed, one of my frustrations with the "short film" as a genre is that its focus on short, self-contained, often insular narratives seems to be a very outmoded and antiquated method of storytelling. It certainly is not one that aligns with contemporary audience expectations. Indeed, I think such a narrative tendency (along with various arcane distribution practices) has contributed greatly to the film industry's recent decline. In fact, I do not really like to refer to *Binary Reboot* as a film. I do it for practical reasons. But I hope I have demonstrated here that my approach to storytelling is

more in line with serialized television, certain kinds of written fiction, converged narratives, and it attempts to contribute to a larger fictional world in a way that a singular “film” cannot.

Production Method

In the most direct sense, the method for my project was film and video production. This, of course, involves a variety of skills, equipment, and processes. This section will discuss the process of production and examine what I learned making the film. First, though, it is necessary to discuss why I chose the medium of film/video. There are several reasons I believe a narrative film is the appropriate object for this creative project. With the need to show technology “in action” and the shifting between various settings, video seems to be the most obvious medium for this story. Further, I think any other medium (audio or prose, for example) would just be too “old-fashioned” for a story about technology. I think the natural union between video and other forms of contemporary technology is a primary reason why stories about technology tend to do well in visual mediums like television or film. Film/video also provides me with the opportunity to show technology in visual terms which I feel is particularly necessary precisely because technology can be overly mechanical in reality and over complex intellectually. I think, for example, of the way the use of split screens allows me to clarify psychological states or physical locations or the way the union between music and images provides the opportunity to strike an appropriate emotional cord at a particular time, and I cannot envision any other medium would have allowed for such opportunities.

Further, I came to the program wanting to gain as many skills in production as I could within the admittedly compressed time frame of a Master’s program. Film production, for all its inherent ridiculousness, seems to me to offer the most comprehensive toolbox of media production skills. Writing is a part of it. Filming is a part of it. Using various kinds of software is

a part of it. Video is a part of it. Audio is a part of it. Actors are a part of it. Collaborating with others who have specialized skills and learning from them is a part of it. And there are numerous other elements that are part of the filmmaking process as well. So making a film provided the opportunity to gain the widest variety of skills. I wanted to come away from the program with the sense that I knew a little about everything involved in media production. I feel filmmaking was the most practical route toward that goal.

Prior to the start of filming, I had planned on using a Blackmagic Camera. But, at least in testing it, I honestly did not find it that impressive. I liked its ease of use, but the footage seemed overly dark and I did not trust myself with lighting well enough to compensate for that. Certainly, that interpretation may reflect my own lack of understanding of the camera's capabilities. But I just was not comfortable undertaking a big project with it. As it happened, our cinematographer owned a Sony A7S. I have kind of always preferred Sony cameras anyway. Further, I knew the camera was excellent in low light, which seemed potentially useful since we had several exterior night scenes (and a couple of interior scenes that needed to be dark). So we decided to just use that camera. It seemed both a technically reasonable decision and a practical, convenient decision.

After some debate and discussion, we also decided to shoot at 60 frames per second, as opposed to a more traditional 24 or 30 frames per second. This decision was made because it seemed like it would generate a more hyperreal, "soap opera" aesthetic. I like that look in general, and I thought it would fit with the retro vibe of the film and also provide a visual representation of some of the themes related to postmodernism discussed in the literature review session.

Further, whatever retro look I got, I wanted it to come from the camera more so than, say, overlays or effects put over the video. As I have mentioned, I am more interested in the experience of watching an old film or television show, and focusing more on aesthetics natural to the image itself (as opposed to manipulating images with effects) seemed more in line with that goal. Also, I think such a choice makes it more impactful and noticeable when I do choose to use effects. For example, every time I use the wave warp effect to simulate the glitch line down the middle of a VHS image, it is done over dialogue that foreshadows the time travel element. If there were too many obvious effects simulating a VHS look, I don't think the use of effects that I do have would stand out as much, and it would become harder to use them with the kind of thematic specificity I prefer. That kind of approach seems like it would lean into pastiche more than the targeted representations of postmodern ideas I wanted to represent visually.

Our lighting choices were at times intentional and aesthetic and at times a matter of necessity and what was available to us. However, for the most important scenes involving Jamie, we made a conscious decision to specifically use and play with varying types of red and blue lighting. The red alludes to the Jesus Girl costume/color scheme while the blue alludes to both technology (blue screen of death, blue as a more general background color on computers, etc.) and a kind of darkness or coldness that is on one side of Jamie but that she is kind of stepping away from.

One lighting choice in particular honestly does not really seem like it worked in hindsight. We wanted something a little more green for the parking lot scene with Chloe since it was outdoors and since it was the beginning of her odyssey; her in her natural, pre-existing state. But there were elements of how the lighting worked with the streetlights that we did not account for and some of the footage has the green feel we wanted and some does not. Also, the green spilled over onto the other characters too much as opposed to just staying focused on Chloe. So I feel

our aesthetic approach was sound in theory but not executed particularly well.

I also wanted to highlight yellows and oranges where they were naturally present in our sets, such as in Chloe's bathroom scene and in the bowling alley. With respect to yellow, I have always liked the idea of how the daisy (a yellow flower) is associated with both death and rebirth. I wanted to allude to that some when we meet Chloe since she is sort of emotionally dead inside at that point but heading toward a journey of rebirth. It is a subtle allusion, perhaps too subtle. But putting a daisy on her would have seemed over the top. With respect to orange, that color is seen prominently when we first see Cara in the bowling alley. At that point we do not know she is Jesus Girl, or even who Jesus Girl is. And we do not know her backstory. Orange is a mixture of red and yellow. So there are some levels of allusion and metaphor at play with the color. There are the ideas about yellow and death and rebirth that I previously mentioned. So, in this context, it foreshadows that Cara ultimately dies. Also, with red as a part of orange, we see a foreshadowing of the Jesus Girl costume colors. I also tried to continue this approach, while also trying for some color variation, in the warmer, but more general, lighting used in various ways in most of Cara's other scenes.

I also decided to rely primarily on lavalier microphones to capture audio. We did usually run a boom microphone for backup, but I wanted the fuller, richer sound of the lavalier microphones, and very little boom audio was used in the film. I have generally found the sound from the boom microphones (at least the ones I have used here) to be too tinny and full of air. They do not really seem to produce rich vocals. As such, the sound is not intimate enough, warm enough, or filled with enough natural reverb for my tastes. As I listen to the dialogue we captured, certainly some of it is good and some is not. But, overall, I am happy with the kind of warmth and fullness it has.

Some of the ADR lines have the sort of sterility and blandness that I associate with boom microphones. As I previously mentioned, I think that kind of sound fits the Cara and Monica scenes. So I am fine with so much of that sound in their dialogue. But with Jamie and Chloe in particular, the relationship is so much more intimate, intense, and emotionally heightened that I really feel like the lavalier microphones were the best choice to get that muddier, crunchier sound that sounds (at least to me) more like audio *happening* as opposed to audio being *recorded*.

The production process also taught me to appreciate some elements of production more than I did before. Previous discussions in this essay make it clear that, for better or worse, I had targeted goals with respect to capturing dialogue and using music. But, going in to the production, that was where my interest in sound ended. I wanted to avoid Foley as much as I could. To be honest, I figured I would get some random sound effects, throw them in when absolutely necessary, and move on. But designing sound effects was actually a part of the post-production process I enjoyed the most and learned the most about. I gained a new sense for how sound effects can contribute to a story psychologically, as opposed to just maintaining continuity and reality. In fact, I found myself disappointed when I did have to rely on pre-existing sound effects (as opposed to recording them myself and fussing over just how I wanted them to work). There is a scene near the end of the film where a character picks up some clothes and puts them in a duffel bag. I created every sound in the scene. None of it comes from audio captured on set. And while I imagine a Foley artist or sound designer would find it laughable, it is probably the part of the film I am proudest of precisely because, going into it, I could not have imagined creating a soundscape like that (as basic as I am sure it would be to audio professionals). Indeed,

after doing that scene, I found myself replacing set captured sound with recorded sound effects whenever I could. Again, I am sure it is not good sound design. But it is my sound design.

Of course, the production process as a whole was fraught with many challenges. The process began in the summer of 2017 when I submitted the first draft of the script and my prospectus. Then in the fall, I worked on rewrites to make the script feasible to film in the time period I had. During the first part of the fall semester I also worked on casting. This turned out to be harder than I anticipated. I have had good luck networking with performers on campus, but I did run into the problem of casting too far in advance. Multiple people who had been involved in my previous films and who had initially agreed to be involved in this project ultimately were unable to do so for various reasons, including the actress who originally portrayed Jamie in *Control and Delete* and *Hover State*. We began filming on November 10, 2017 and, as of that time, the role of Jamie had not yet been recast. So it really was playing out like some sort of Hollywood casting disaster story. This meant that Jamie's scenes could not be filmed until the spring semester. That was generally how I had planned it anyway, but it also left me less time to prepare the character's shoots. Fortunately, I networked with an actress who had solid film experience and she slid into the role seamlessly.

The first part of the fall semester was also spent getting props, wardrobe, and locations. Again, this did not always go smoothly (including the problem of finding a location for the scene that was ultimately shot in the bowling alley on campus), but in general everything worked out reasonably well. When we were finally ready to begin filming, it was late enough in the semester that we had to deal with weather challenges and Thanksgiving schedules as well. Filming spanned the end of the fall semester and the beginning of the spring semester. We filmed on the

following dates: November 10, 16, and 17; December 7; January 18, 20, 25, and 27; and February 3 and 5.

Some shoots were short (just a few hours) and others were all day shoots. The scenes involving Cara and Monica were filmed during the fall semester and everything else was shot in the spring semester. The first scene we filmed was the bathroom scene between Monica and Cara (scene 18 in the script) and the last scene we filmed was the phone call scene with the Agent Scott character (scene 8 in the script). The final night of shooting also involved filming all the scenes between Jamie and Agent Scott.

While several members of my cohort helped out as crewmembers here and there, I primarily recruited crewmembers from the introductory production classes in the Telecommunications department (known as the “Gateway” class) and also networked with a few crewmembers through advanced video production classes. We ended up with a core group of about 5 to 7 crewmembers with some others coming and going as their schedules allowed. This, of course, meant that we had some inconsistency (and therefore inefficiency) in roles on the crew. We also were working with students who were inexperienced using the equipment. Many of them were using certain pieces of equipment for the first time. As such, there were definitely some technical hiccups. For example, the inter-credits scene set in the Seattle Police Department interrogation room had horrific audio for some reason. I do recall we had someone new from Gateway running audio that day, and we were also using a new recorder. So there are several things that could have potentially gone wrong. But the quality of the audio is the specific reason there is music (and a particular kind of music) over that scene. It is an attempt to cover serious noise that noise reduction could not handle without decaying the dialogue, and it is an attempt to divert the audience’s attention via particularly catchy music that also hearkens back to the music used in

the opening credits. In other words, I tried to give the audience a lot of things to focus on other than the quality of the scene's audio.

We also experienced all the challenges one might expect from location shooting on a college campus from the inability to access locations, to uncontrolled ambient noise, to foot traffic interrupting our shoot. I also learned that noise from the football stadium could be heard behind the Letterman building. That was an unpleasant surprise. But in general I feel we overcame those obstacles reasonably well. At least as I see it, nothing that happened in those environments sticks out as a particularly bad part of the film. One thing I have heard other student filmmakers in the department lament is how difficult it is to make Ball State's campus look like something other than a college campus. I feel we did a pretty good job of that. There is one shot where you can see the Ball State logo and name if you are looking for it. But otherwise, I think we chose the most "uncollege" looking locations possible on campus. I felt the area behind Letterman, for example, looked reasonably authentic as a park or walking area. The bowling alley shows no discernable signs of being a college bowling alley. The one classroom we used (for the scene where Monica is rescued by Cara) was purposely lit so darkly that I don't think you can tell what it is other than a dark, dank room. And other campus locations were made to look more like what they were supposed to be.

This leads me into a discussion of the level of set design and production design we did. That is another facet that I feel I learned a great deal about. I am rather proud of some things we accomplished on that front. I am specifically very proud of the surveillance room we designed and built (used near the end of the film when Jamie is communicating with the character who is in police custody). I kind of felt designing and using that set was our most "professional" moment. The footage we shot in it was quite good, I feel. Further, we kind of decided it needed

to look cool and that there was just no place on campus that would give us the look we needed. So, in spite of the fact that it threw some other things behind, Hart Boesel and myself basically took a week to locate all the equipment, move it to the room we used (one of the rooms used for focus groups on the second floor of Letterman), set it all up, do all the other things that darkened the room and projected numbers on the wall, figure out how to film around all of our junk, and so on. There were several points in the principle photography phase where we kind had to take what we could get and just go with it in a run and gun style, so to speak. But, with the surveillance room, we saw we had a chance to make something that looked cool and gave the story some extra pop, so we took the time (and exerted the effort) to do it.

We also designed and made the evidence board seen in the FBI interrogation scenes. This also lent an air of authenticity to the production and provided some ways to hint at story details. For example, the character of Monica is on the board and labeled “missing.” The board also alludes to mob violence, assassinations, unexplained phenomenon, global panic, and particular locations relevant to the story. It not only looked like something you might see in an interrogation room, but it also provided some exposition, particularly via the way it was used in the opening credits.

I also feel the project provided me with a good opportunity to develop my skills in working with performers. Of course, a part of how successful I might have been at this on any given shoot depended, at least to an extent, on how well-stocked our crew was or was not on a given day. I definitely felt the difference that made. There were shoots where I had plenty of time and space to talk with actors between takes or to look at the script and think about performance issues. And there were other shoots where honestly there was just too much chaos between takes for much of that. But it was something I was acutely aware of the need for on this project and, when possible, I focused as heavily on it as I could.

I also feel that, by the time the shoot started, I had compiled a very good portfolio of character research for the four central characters (Jamie, Chloe, Monica, and Cara). Of course, it is somewhat like giving a student material to study. You cannot be sure what they will and will not use and I suspect some performers availed themselves of the material I provided better than others. But I provided each actress with the following prior to the beginning of filming:

1. An overview of the character, including biographical information
2. Access to other screenplays or stories featuring their character (when applicable)
3. A discussion of their attitude toward other characters, particularly their primary antagonist/protagonist
4. A playlist of songs that I felt defined the character and provided insight into the psychology and motivation of the characters
5. A discussion of comparable/influential characters from various films and television shows
6. A discussion of what I hoped to reflect or allude to in wardrobe choices

Of course, I also wanted to be mindful to avoid excessive directing as well. While I do not know how this mindset would be viewed among directors or actors, I feel the principles of delegating should apply to acting as well. Get good cast members, prepare them, then turn them loose to do what they are trained to do. One piece of advice someone gave me during this project (and I do not remember who exactly) is that really there should always be someone on set who knows more about each particular aspect of a production than does the director. For example, the cinematographer should know more about getting good shots. The audio person should know more about sound. And so on. To the extent that is true, it seems to me the actors should know more about acting. And, of course, I wanted to be mindful and respectful of the fact that most of these performers have received targeted, focused, expert training via their curriculum in the Theatre department. So I knew I lacked the knowledge necessary to really intervene at a deep level on acting theory, pedagogy, etc.

So, for me, I saw this as an opportunity to mostly learn the process and rhythm of working with actors. I did not so much worry about being a “good” director of actors as I did learning more about what they expect, what they are motivated by, how they go about their craft, and how to translate their performances to the camera. I can recount two particular anecdotes involving interactions with the actress playing Jamie that I think sum up my approach and why my awareness of my own limitations was beneficial. While filming a scene, she said a line different than what was in the script. The line was written as, “what you got, Seattle?” During one take she said, “show me what you got, Seattle.” She noticed she had said it wrong and stopped. I told her I liked what she said better because it was more “her” and less of my words on a page, and we used her alteration of the line for the rest of the takes and in the final film.

Another anecdote involves her wardrobe for that scene. I gave her general guidelines of what I was looking for. When she changed into that wardrobe and I saw it, I kind of bristled. Some things about it did not seem right to me because it was not what I had in my head. She offered to go home and change, but I mostly did not want to get any farther behind schedule so I just went with it. But I started filming the scene unhappy with it. But it ended up working quite well for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is it alluded to another character’s wardrobe in a way I had asked her to be mindful of. I just did not see those allusions until we got “in action” with it. Then they stood out. So I assume her training in wardrobe and costuming allowed her to understand how to get at what was in my head better than I could have communicated to her with my limited theatre/acting vocabulary and knowledge. So she was better at giving me what I was hoping for on her own than she would have been had I intervened more.

This discussion is certainly just an overview of what I learned during the production process. A lot of other things went right and a lot of other things went wrong. But hopefully the examples

I have discussed here provide a general understanding of how my production method was executed. Of course, post-production is also an important part of the method of film and video production. And that was also an experience worth discussing in some detail.

Of course, the most time consuming part of the post-production process is editing. And this involves it's own bit of pre-production via importing, organizing, and syncing files. File organization was much more difficult than it needed to be because, quite frankly, we did not practice good slating and file management practices on set. While we did learn some things related to file management we did not realize before, admittedly a lot of our disorganization on this front came at times when we were simply understaffed and felt too overwhelmed by other things to be mindful of best practices of which we were admittedly aware.

But once all that was taken care of and I got into the editing process, I felt I really hit a groove. I have learned through this experience that I am most proficient in, and most interested in, in writing and editing. Most of the on set work seems like it would be a good way to break someone you are interrogating. Just force them to make a movie. That will get them to talk. I feel my previous films demonstrate the seeds of a particular tone and visual style. And I really got to expand and refine this style with this project. I feel there is a clear and specific aesthetic at play; one that is self-aware and intentionally pokes at various filmmaking conventions. I also think I learned a lot about visually alternating between tense drama and light comedy. That kind of contradiction is always present in my writing, but now I have a sense of how to project it visually as well. I got a lot of practice at figuring out how I wanted things to look and experimenting with ways to get there.

There are a few specific aesthetic decisions I made during the editing process I would like to discuss because I think they either provide insight into my general style or because they explain

more directly some artistic choices. Of course, the film starts with a cold open/teaser scene. Then it transitions into a montage that includes both exposition and opening credits. It was cut together as a montage, and in the way it was, to try to condense and intensify some action and continuity that, on its own, I feared would be too slow.

There are three primary things happening in the opening montage/credits: Chloe is at her desk looking at some documents, Jamie is watching television while Agent Cooper enters the room, and Monica is mourning at a grave. There is limited physical action and dialogue in much of this. Also, what physical action there is involves heavy continuity. For example, Chloe closes one document and opens another. She goes through all the business of getting up from her desk and putting her jacket on. Agent Cooper enters the room and exchanges snarky glances with Jamie, who is fidgeting in a chair. That is a lot of stuff to show just to maintain continuity if it is done in a more straightforward manner. So cutting between different things in a montage style provided me with the opportunity to do away with narratively unnecessary continuity.

I suppose all that could be done in a montage that is separate from the opening credits. But I do not feel that, in that context, it would have been as reasonable to have the other video that sort of previewed various other story elements. In that way, the aesthetics of the opening credits (decontextualized montage shots of action or narrative) provided more opportunities to liven up narrative, continuity, and exposition. Also, doing just a montage would have meant doing credits somewhere else in some other fashion, or not doing them at all (and if people worked on the project, I want to credit them in both the open and the close). Further, I did want television style opening credits (as opposed to film style opening credits) to sort of align myself more with a television aesthetic and storytelling agenda (as opposed to a film aesthetic or storytelling agenda).

I have also generally adopted the *Black Mirror* approach to closing credits in my previous work, an approach that involves interspersing the closing credits piecemeal with story or action. There are several things I like about this approach, including the way it unifies (as opposed to separates) the story and the people involved in making it. So I thought it would be an interesting extension of that concept to transport it to the opening credits as well.

I also generally use a quicker, more frantic style of editing. Some of this is based purely in personal preferences. My visual style in general is heavily influenced by music videos (particularly early to peak era music videos), which rely on quick, inconsistent, often jarring editing and pacing styles. Beyond my personal affinity for that style, though, I see it as a way to mitigate some potential issues with my writing style. I am very self-aware about the dialogue heavy nature of my writing. It is something I have worked to improve, but it is also heavily ingrained in my general style and I would not want to lose it entirely. I am probably unique in this sense, but I actually get more bored during long stretches of action in films and television shows than I do during long stretches of dialogue. For example, I tend to zone out quickly during car chases or fight scenes. It all just seems like a bunch of random images to me; something akin to flipping through a photo album.

Still, I know heavy dialogue can be off putting to some. So my hope is that quick, jarring editing can give the dialogue more momentum. Indeed, I tend to edit the most (and the fastest) during long stretches of dialogue. This can be seen in two of Jamie's longer lines, one of which I initially wanted to make a cut on every word (I ultimately did not go that far). Of course, one can argue that such an editing style can cause the audience to lose focus on the dialogue, which often contains essential information. That may indeed be a fair criticism. But I feel part of the learning process of this project also comes from what kind of reaction it gets from a broader audience

once it is done and put out into the world. My style may or may not be effective in general. But one way I can figure that out is getting a sense of how people respond to it in a finished form.

I have also found that I have a tendency to edit on “words” more than action. Of course, words occur wherever they do during a line. There are several places in the film where I would not have made a cut except that I wanted to transition to a specific shot or angle for a specific line, or even sometimes just a specific word. And, since I typically just want the shot to be associated with a particular line or word, I cut away again as soon as the word or line in question is done. So it certainly is a different form of pacing.

There are several examples of this approach in the film, but the segment running from 23:00 to 23:30 perhaps best demonstrates it. For most of this excerpt, Monica and Cara are trading lines and the cuts sort of go as I would imagine one would expect them to; when a character begins talking or to show some particular emotional reaction, etc. And, if anything, the pacing feels a little slow to me throughout the exchange. But there is a quick cutaway to Monica at 23:27 that is shorter than any other cut. The shot goes to Monica when Cara says “in the future” and cuts back to Cara for the rest of the line. This cut is uniquely short in the sequence. It is made on a particular series of three words, and only for those three words, to foreshadow that Monica is from the future. There are several places in the film where this kind of thing happens and that may account for some unusual pacing. It occurs to me in thinking about it that the function of it is to allow me to use words almost like a cutaway, which would fit with my more general approach of thinking about editing more in terms of words than visuals. I think this strategy is at least one reason for some of the unconventional pacing.

I also violate other editing conventions here and there in the film. Different specific instances of this approach have different specific motivations, but in general I do it when I feel it gets the

narrative someplace in an overall easier, more efficient, or more impactful way. There are also times where such strategies are used to emulate a certain psychological state, to time with a music cue in a particular way, or to hopefully add emotional resonance to a line or scene.

A detailed explanation of one instance that probably violates multiple rules might provide insight into how I think through the use of otherwise nonconventional, and even sometimes technically incorrect, techniques. There is a sequence that runs from 19:07 to 19:17 that uses a particularly awkward fade of both image and music to foreshadow Cara's fate and Jamie's relationship to her. In the sequence, we see Cara symbolically (but not literally) "crossing over" into Jamie's world just as Chloe asks Jamie, "where do you go when you leave?" Cara is on screen with Chloe when Chloe asks the question. So that is a question for Cara as well. Then, we see Cara on screen with Jamie as Jamie says to Chloe, "aw, miss me?" So, again, the question is also symbolically directed at Cara. Then the picture and audio fade out, and do so quite abruptly, leaving nothing on screen. The goal of this use of fades (when linked with the question of "miss me?") is to imply an unexpected loneliness, loss, and fatalism.

I also hope to imply a kind of link between Jamie and Cara that is tragically broken. This is, of course, given some direct resolution when, near the end of the film, we get the sense that Jamie is going to become Jesus Girl – and there need to be other Jesus Girls because Cara died somewhere along the line. Further, it is an allusion to the fact that Jamie and Cara are a mother and daughter who never knew each other. This is the one plot point from my larger mythology that I was disappointed I was not able to specifically address in the film. So I at least wanted something that subconsciously suggests some kind of more intimate and tragic link between Jamie and Cara.

I also must confess to a feeling that some filmmaking and editing rules are products of an era when audiences were not nearly as literate about filmmaking principles as they are now. The joke I have often made is that, best I can figure, the justification for a lot of filmmaking rules is that some Russian and French guys said so in the 1920s. I feel contemporary viewers are sufficiently versed in how film is made to understand, for example, that when the line is broken, it just means there has been a cut to another angle or camera. It is probably not good to break the line on dialogue or in mid-action because you would be asking the audience to process narrative and new spatial relations at once. But if it happens at a break in action or dialogue, that seems to me to be a different matter. Of course, I am admittedly an amateur and, as is the case with linking my dialogue with faster editing, I am trying to learn how I feel about applying various rules of filmmaking. And part of that process is experimentation. Some of my aesthetics may indeed just be horrific. But some may also work in spite of being unconventional. That is something I imagine I will have a better sense of in hindsight as part of the learning process of this project.

I have already discussed my use of music and what I hoped to achieve with it. I wanted to further develop and broaden that experience of consuming popular culture in the eighties and chose to do this via using other eighties technology within the story. For example, there are several vinyl record pops that act as transitions or intentional “record skips” when there is a shift in action. There are also uses of radio static, particularly when transitioning between action that is set in the present day and the past. And, of course, there is liberal use of fonts and b-roll reminiscent of VHS tapes, as well as several intentional “glitches” in the picture. I hope this aesthetic seems kind of out of place at first. After all, I try to hide the fact that some action takes place in the past. So I specifically would like for the audience to kind of wonder why a story

seemingly about present day technology seems to have so much of a retro aesthetic. Ideally, all that would become, in hindsight, obvious foreshadowing when the time travel reveal happens. All of these aesthetic decisions were thought about and created during the editing and post-production process.

The ADR process was also an important part of post-production. I had no experience with ADR recording prior to this project. I was fortunate to network with an undergraduate student who was a competent engineer, so that made it much easier. And while I initially saw any ADR that needed to be done as another hindrance to completing the project, I really came to appreciate the potential to direct things one more time that it provides. Having said that, I do feel that, in general, the ADR performances are not as good as on set performances were. I imagine this is a combination of my lack of experience directing and the actors' lack of experience with ADR acting.

With the Monica and Cara characters in particular, there was also the matter of needing a lot of ADR and having limited time with them. Given the amount of ADR involved for those two performers, I probably really needed double the time I had. I also sort of found that there was a distinctly different type of character in the ADR version of Jamie than I got out of the set performances. I am not sure what that was about. I will need to reflect on it more. I only noticed it when I went to add in those ADR lines. Something about the performances are distinctly different and I cannot yet put my finger on what that is. But fortunately Jamie needed minimal ADR, so it is not a big issue. It's just one of those things that I have learned to be mindful of going forward.

Finally, I would like to address one other issue relevant to the use of music in the film. In addition to the eighties vibe I wanted to achieve, I also felt synthesizer-based music fit best with

a story about technology. After all, the rise of synthesizer music marked a kind of technical revolution in popular music (Warner, 2017) that was, in its time, both lauded and criticized in ways that mirror our complicated relationship with contemporary technology (Glitsos, 2018). Something about a more traditional orchestral score in a story about a hacker seems off, unless perhaps done ironically. So I had no interest in a “traditional” approach to film music.

Further, I wanted the music to carry the action from scene to scene. I feel there is probably, at least by accepted standards, a little too much music in the film. But, again, this fits with an eighties film vibe where songs that were identifiable as songs (as opposed to a subtle score) would play through entire scenes. I wanted to emulate that approach as well not only for reasons based in nostalgia, but also because it was a way to further foreground, and bring attention to, technology as a part of the storytelling apparatus.

I feel this method of music use is best demonstrated during the climax of Jamie and Chloe’s story, spanning from the 22:10 mark to the 25:40 mark in the film. A singular song plays through the entirety of this sequence as the various plotlines move toward resolution. The pace of the various resolutions feels so much quicker and more connected through the use of a song to tie it all together. This approach borrows heavily from a variety of eighties films with montages or songs featured in critical scenes, but it also borrows most directly from the television show *Cold Case* (Stiehm, Bruckheimer, & Littman, 2004), which frequently used music to evoke nostalgia and used a song at the end of every episode.. I feel the particular stretch of *Binary Reboot* discussed here comes closest to achieving my overall aesthetic vision and the use of music has a lot to do with that.

There are, of course, a variety of other aspects of the production process that I did not mention or glossed over here. But overall, I hope this section outlines what stand out to me as the

most important elements of the film's production method, those where the failures or successes were particularly impactful, and those that I learned the most from.

The final product, once completed and approved by my committee, will be a video file exported in the H.264/MPEG-4 format suitable for HD (1920x1080) viewing. The completed film will be distributed via video sharing platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. It will also be posted on my personal website. I will also consider submitting the finished film to some industry workshops and competitions; for example Amazon Video has a contest for completed episodic pilots where feedback is provided to all entrants and Sundance has a similar program. Indeed, I view the piece as more of a pilot than a "film," and I view my various other films and screenplays with which it is connected as something more of a "first season." Since the film is not a standalone piece, I do not know how it would fit into traditional film festivals. But I would certainly consider submitting it to whatever appropriate festivals I might find.

Conclusion/Discussion

This essay provides a discussion of my experiences conceptualizing and creating my final creative project, a short film titled *Binary Reboot*. The essay discusses my academic and creative influences, describes the production process, outlines my motivations and goals for various creative choices along the way, and provides some commentary on what worked and did not work during the production process. I feel the film reflects the capstone of my experiences in the program in ways that both reflect my initial goals upon entering the program and in ways that demonstrate the culmination of my actual experiences in the program. I came to the program hoping to learn as much as I could about contemporary trends in production. I feel this experience certainly provided me with a variety of new skills.

Beyond that, my work in the program clearly took a particular direction with respect to the type of storytelling I became most interested in. I did not necessarily set out to create a fictional universe or develop a series of interconnected narratives when I started the program, but that is what happened. I feel that the link between my final project and other work I have done in the program makes the experience a capstone in the truest and most complete sense. I feel that, to the extent it is reasonable, such connectedness between a suite of creative work in the program should be encouraged in the future.

I also feel my influences and aesthetic choices reflect a specific agenda with respect to how I believe digital storytelling, particularly the kind owing heavily to television and film, needs to evolve. Along the way, I have discussed ways my film (and the related pieces of my larger portfolio) both lean into contemporary trends while also challenging some creative and ideological conventions of entertainment media. Broadly speaking, I believe contemporary trends related to technology, gender, heroes, and nostalgia in popular culture are generally being executed well by television and film, but there also needs to be attention paid to modernizing and updating these narratives to reflect cultural and social changes. In addition, I think television and film needs to become less concerned with reactions to overt political content and more sensitive to the tangible implications of the ideological assumptions inherent in storytelling forms. In my opinion, there is, and perhaps always has been, a certain kind of hypocrisy in the manner in which television and film in particular interact with politics, culture, and ideology.

Finally, I feel as if I have created something that has a marketable, accessible storyline and characters. I am sure my project is technically flawed and amateurish in ways I am not even aware of. However, from a general storytelling standpoint, I feel confident in my skills now and believe I have found a creative voice and perspective that is sufficiently unique and viable.

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Appendix A – *Binary Reboot* Shooting Script

Binary Reboot

By

Jason Phillips

Final Shooting Script

PHILLIPS, BINARY REBOOT

FADE-IN

1 INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM - EVENING

1

CHLOE stands in front of a mirror. A young woman dressed professionally. She seems timid. Appearance restrained and bound. Posture tense. Rehearsing some kind of speech.

CHLOE

Ms. Butler...Ms. Butler...Ms.

Butler...

(Looking for the right way to say it)

Thank you for seeing me. If I may, I'd like to outline my credentials for the promotion in...

(Her phone rings. Sitting on the sink. She answers it.)

Hi, honey. Listen, I am getting ready for...

A male voice comes through the line cutting her off. Her boyfriend KEITH.

KEITH (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

Did you get the beer?

CHLOE

Huh, I'm sorry. Excuse me?

KEITH (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

Beer. For when the boys come over for the game.

CHLOE

Oh. Your friends are coming over tonight? I believe you forgot to mention that, dear.

KEITH (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

Oh. Well, they are. So clean the place up too.

The line clicks. He's gone. She sighs. Back to rehearsing.

CHLOE

As you know, Ms. Butler, I've been involved with several successful product launches. Also, I have...

2.

2 INT. OFFICE - EVENING

2

An e-mail is open on a computer. The SUBJECT LINE reads:
PROMOTION.

A hand scrolls down the message showing the text: HELLO
TEAM, I'M PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT REGGIE PERRY HAS BEEN BE
PROMOTED TO...

CUT TO Chloe at her desk in a cubicle reading the message.
Defeat washed over her face. She closes the message. Opens a
document labeled: FISCAL YEAR REPORT.

She scrolls down the document. Stops on a section that
reads: QUARTERLY LOSSES COMPOUNDED BY UNDISCIPLINED VENTURES
INITIATED BY REGGIE PERRY.

She scrolls to another section: HIGHEST PROFIT YIELDS -
DONALDSON TECH DEAL DEVELOPED BY CHLOE CASPER.

Chloe shakes her head in disbelief. But too timid to even
seem angry. More resigned and frustrated. She closes the
document. Stands. Puts on a jacket that's slung over the
wall of her cubicle. Preparing to leave for the night. She
reaches for a lamp on her desk. Clicks it off. Bathing the
desk in darkness. Then a flash of light cuts through the
dark as her phone lights up with an incoming call. Chloe
looks at it. Picks the phone up from her desk and answers.

CHLOE

Hello?

A FEMALE VOICE comes from the phone.

FEMALE VOICE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

Chloe Casper?

CHLOE

Yes?

FEMALE VOICE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

We need to talk. I have a little
job for you.

3 EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

3

A woman in her 20s kneels at a gravestone. This is MONICA.
Obviously vulnerable in this moment. After a few beats, she
stands. Her mood changes. The vulnerability giving way to
something driven and entitled. Takes her phone out. Hits
some buttons then speaks into it.

(CONTINUED)

PHILLIPS, BINARY REBOOT

CONTINUED:

3.

MONICA

Petey...send in the men with the
shovels.

(Ends the call. Looks down at
the grave.)

I'll see you soon.

4 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

4

JAMIE, a woman in her 20s, sits alone in the room. Jamie carries herself with a great deal of confidence, even a hint of arrogance. She has that kind of genius level intellect that makes it difficult for her not to think she's a little above it all. As Jamie sits there, a television is on behind her. A newscast is on with an anchor delivering a story.

ANCHOR ON TV

Last night's incident marks the
latest sighting of the masked
vigilante known as "Jesus Girl."
Prior to resurfacing last month,
the vigilante had not been seen in
over 15 years. A staple of urban
legend lore in the 80s and 90s,
Jesus Girl disappeared around the
turn of the millennium...

As the report nears the end, the door opens and FBI AGENT JO ANNA COOPER enters. She gives the TV a look that is both knowing and irritated. Picks up a remote and turns the TV off. Jo Anna is a little older than Jamie but still young. She is very accomplished for such a young age so she also moves through life with excessive confidence.

JAMIE

Did you get the bad guys?

JO ANNA

We did. Hell of a bust.

JAMIE

You're welcome.

JO ANNA

I don't recall thanking you.

JAMIE

Whatever. I'm not here to get the
feels with you. I just want you to
help Monica.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

4.

JO ANNA

If she's missing, just pull some of
your hacker magic out of your ass
to find her.

JAMIE

You don't think I've tried? It's
like she's...nowhere.

JO ANNA

Maybe she got tired of helping you
stay on the run. Regardless...why
bother me with it?

JAMIE

You can't imagine how many cops and
feds I've made look like fools. But
you got me. You beat me. So if
anybody can find Monica, it's you
Agent Cooper.

JO ANNA

Not interested.

JAMIE

You should be. Monica has been in
charge of the mob since Mr. Claude
died. Now what do you think happens
if she stays out of the picture too
long?

JO ANNA

(Realizing the point)
A power vacuum. A battle for
control.

JAMIE

A full-blown mob war. Like a bad
PBS show.

Jo Anna takes this in. Probably realizing Jamie makes sense.
But before they can continue, Jo Anna's phone buzzes. She
takes it out and at looks it. Sighs heavily.

JO ANNA

When it rains it pours around here.
(Stands)
I have to go. Another case.

JAMIE

Well, wait. We...

(CONTINUED)

PHILLIPS, BINARY REBOOT

CONTINUED:

5.

JO ANNA
(Condescending)
It's urgent. You'll have to wait.

Jo Anna exits. Jamie watches her go.

5 INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - EVENING

5

A young woman sits slumped on the floor. This is FBI AGENT KAREN SCOTT. Talking on a corded wall phone. She seems sheepish and embarrassed.

AGENT SCOTT
She says it's the wrong address.
GPS is spoofed. Apparently it's
like two towns over. She says she's
got it down to a two-block radius.

6 INT. STAIRWELL - EVENING

6

Jo Anna stands in a stairwell. The action intercuts between Jo Anna and Agent Scott.

JO ANNA
What? Christ. How would she even
figure that out? How did she even
know where we were going?

AGENT SCOTT
She, um, hacked our files I guess.

JO ANNA
And how was she able to do that?

7 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

7

Jamie sits at the table as Agent Scott places a folder in front of her, directing her where to sign some documents.

AGENT SCOTT
Sign there.
(Jamie signs her name to the
document)
And there.

JAMIE
(As she finishes her second
signature)
Sticking me with a rookie, huh? Not
very flattering.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

6.

AGENT SCOTT

How do you know I'm a rookie?

JAMIE

You think I don't know the entire life story of everyone in this building...Agent...Scott. Two weeks out of Quantico, huh? Wow. If I were you, I'd be pretty nervous trying to hang with the likes of me.

Agent Scott gives her a look that is clearly rattled. Jamie seizes on it. She lunges forward, half comical half serious. Agent Scott recoils in fear and surprise. Jamie laughs sardonically as Agent Scott tries to recompose herself.

8 INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - EVENING

8

Back to Agent Scott and her phone conversation with Jo Anna.

AGENT SCOTT

She...stole my phone.

Jo Anna begins screaming recriminations through the phone as Agent Scott hangs her head.

9 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

9

Jamie is standing and pacing now, hitting buttons frantically on a phone.

JAMIE

(Nods, but seems hesitant)
This will have to do. No time to even run simulations. Ridiculous. It's like 1983 up in here.

10 INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - EVENING

10

Back to Agent Scott talking to Jo Anna. The action intercuts between them.

JO ANNA

Shit! They'll have those girls out of the country and sold before we make it. Police there are too corrupt to risk sending them in.

AGENT SCOTT

She said that too. I think she's getting back-up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

7.

JO ANNA
What kind of back-up?

FADE TO BLACK

OVER BLACK

REPLAY OF DIALOGUE FROM SCENE TWO

A reply of the call Chloe got. It is Jamie's voice on the other end.

JAMIE (VO, OVER BLACK)
Chloe Casper? We need to talk. I
have a little job for you.

FADE-IN

11 INT. OFFICE - EVENING

11

Chloe at her desk. The action intercuts between Chloe in her office and Jamie in the interrogation room.

CHLOE
Who...who is this?

JAMIE
Somebody who can take control of
your grandmother's car. Slam it
into whatever I want.

CHLOE
What? if this is one of the girls
in the mailroom again, I will...
just please stop picking on me.

JAMIE
God you're whiney. O.K. How's this
for picking on you?

CHLOE
(Looks at her phone, flushes
with fear)
Grandma...

JAMIE
Now...are you with me, Chloe?

CHLOE
What do I have to do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

8.

JAMIE
First, go to the store on 33rd.
Steal some rope.

CHLOE
Steal? Why can't I just buy it?

JAMIE
No questions Chloe. No time for
that.

CHLOE
O.K. O.K. Please...
(Stands quickly and urgently)
I'm leaving now. Just don't hurt my
grandmother.

12 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

12

Monica stands in front of a cooler. A young woman in a black
jacket approaches her. The GIRL IN BLACK.

GIRL IN BLACK
You looking for something in
particular?

MONICA
Hmm? Oh. Diet Mountain Dew.

The Girl in Black gives Monica a curious look. Something
about this innocuous exchange catches her attention.

GIRL IN BLACK
Hmm. Diet Mountain Dew, huh?

13 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

13

Jamie continues working on the phone. After a few beats,
Agent Scott enters. A laptop in her hand.

AGENT SCOTT
Jo Anna said to get you a laptop.
Just let me enter the password.

Jamie grabs the laptop, sits down at a table with it and
begins keying.

JAMIE
Yeah, I don't do passwords.

AGENT SCOTT
Whatever. Jo Anna also wants...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

9.

JO ANNA

Jo Anna can kiss my ass! All her fancy FBI toys and her big brain and she lets herself get played by some lousy human traffickers. Now I gotta play hero.

14 INT. ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING - NIGHT

14

Monica is tied to a chair in a dark room. Sounds of fighting coming from outside the door. Monica sneers. She doesn't seem worried about this seemingly precarious situation. When the sound of fighting stops, the door opens to reveal a young woman in a vigilante/superhero costume. Maroon biker pants. Black boots and shirt. A red hockey mask with a black cross down the center. The previously mentioned vigilante Jesus Girl. In the hall, several men lie unconscious.

MONICA

(Eyeing the costume)
I liked what you had on last night better. The jacket was crazy retro. This? Tacky.

Jesus Girl sighs. Takes off the mask. The Girl in Black.

GIRL IN BLACK

How'd you know it was me?

15 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

15

Jamie watches Chloe on the laptop as Chloe walks down the street. Jamie addresses Agent Scott.

JAMIE

You don't have to babysit me. I really don't...
(Stops, rolls eyes)
Oh, what fresh hell is this?

16 EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

16

A young man steps in front of Chloe. This is LIBERAL GUY. Fliers in his hand. Holds one out. The action intercuts between Chloe and Liberal Guy and Jamie and Agent Scott.

LIBERAL GUY

Hey, we're protesting the President here tonight.

CHLOE

Huh? What? No, thank you. I can't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

10.

LIBERAL GUY
Are you a fascist?

CHLOE
(Tries to step around, he)
blocks her
What? No. I...

LIBERAL GUY
Well, if you don't oppose
everything the President does,
you're a fascist.

CHLOE
Please, I can't...really...you
don't understand!

LIBERAL GUY
That's a microaggression! You're
saying I'm dumb!

SPLIT SCREEN OF JAMIE AND CHLOE

JAMIE/CHLOE (IN UNISON)
What?

Back to Liberal Guy and Chloe.

LIBERAL GUY
Apologize for your privilege!
Apologize!

CHLOE
(Still timid, but finally
admitting some things to
herself)
Look, I've got a crappy boss. An
even crappier boyfriend. I just
lost a promotion to a white guy who
is beyond incompetent. Not to
mention what's happening to me now.
So if you think I'm privileged...

As all this goes on, another man, CONSERVATIVE GUY, enters
the scene. Watching what's happening.

CONSERVATIVE GUY
(To Chloe)
Is this hippie bothering you,
little lady?
(To Liberal Guy)
Can't you see she's trying to get
home to fix dinner for her man.

(CONTINUED)

PHILLIPS, BINARY REBOOT

CONTINUED:

11.

CHLOE

Huh?

CONSERVATIVE GUY

(To Liberal Guy)

Now, my great-great granddaddy
didn't sail over here from Europe
so you could give the country to a
bunch of foreigners! Give me that!

Begins trying to take the flier from Liberal Guy. They
engage in a tug of war over it.

17 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

17

JAMIE

(Watching all this on the
laptop, frustrated)

You two are ruining everything!

(Takes Agent Scott's phone)

Gimme your phone. I need a picture
of you.

AGENT SCOTT

Hey! What the hell are you doing?

18 EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

18

LIBERAL GUY

(Screaming out, a tantrum)
Privilege! I'm surrounded by
privilege! I need a safe space!

CONSERVATIVE GUY

This land is my land!
(Stomping his foot, a big
baby)
Mine! Mine!

Liberal Guy's phone buzzes. He takes it out. Looks at it.
Then Conservative Guy's phone buzzes. He takes it out and
looks down at it.

LIBERAL GUY

(Looking at his phone)

Huh. It's a text from a chick.
Thinks it's sexy how I stick up for
my oppressed brothers and sisters.

CONSERVATIVE GUY

Oh yeah? You should see this chick
who says she wants us to do it on
the wall when they get it built!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

12.

Chloe shakes her head. Tries to pass. Liberal Guy blocks her.

LIBERAL GUY
(Texting as he talks to her)
No, we are not done disciplining
you. Hang on. Gonna see if she
wants to MSNBC and chill.

Chloe looks up. Sees a sign that shows road work notices. Suddenly the sign lights up: KICK THEM IN THE JUNK. NOW, CHLOE!!

Chloe's eyes widen. She swallows hard as Liberal Guy and Conservative Guy remain distracted by their respective text messages. Chloe takes a deep breath. Gathers herself. Then... Pow. Kicks Liberal Guy right in the family jewels. Liberal Guy drops to his knees. She then turns and does the same to Conservative Guy, both writhing in pain on the ground now.

A look of release washes over Chloe. A newly formed edge bursting out. Something set loose in her. She turns and walks briskly down the street.

19 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

19

AGENT SCOTT
(To Jamie)
You're weird. I...need an aspirin.

Agent Scott Grabs her phone. Turns and exits. Perplexed beyond belief.

20 INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - NIGHT

20

The Girl in Black stands against a sink. Arms crossed. Put-upon. A toilet flushes. Monica emerges from the stall.

MONICA
Whew! Note to self, do not get tied
up after drinking a big gulp.

GIRL IN BLACK
I should've left you there. Left a
sink running.

MONICA
Huh? Oh, right. The Bloody Mary
prank at that slumber party. When
we made you wet yourself. C'mon, we
were just kids.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

13.

GIRL IN BLACK

And I'd love for Monica Drake to remain a bad childhood memory. But you go and show up here. Where you have no business.

MONICA

You didn't have any business coming here either. But it suits you, huh? Big, bad Jesus Girl. How throwback. And just the kind of ass kicker I need. I know you've been keeping an eye on me since you figured out who I was. So I bet you know what I've got back at my hotel.

GIRL IN BLACK

Yeah. I do. And I don't like the looks of it. Why did you show up here with a dead girl?

MONICA

To bring her back to life.

21 INT. GENERAL STORE - EVENING

21

Chloe walks fast toward the exit of the store. The cashier calls to her.

CASHIER

Hold it!

The cashier comes out from behind the counter. She pushes on the door. It won't open. He grabs her arm.

CHLOE

Ow...you're hurting me...please stop...

CASHIER

Take it out of your jacket! Now!

She takes a reel of rope out of her jacket. He takes it.

CHLOE

(Just gushing fear)
Sir, you don't understand. She was making me...threatened my grandma...and please, I...

CASHIER

Man, this sucks. Every time I gotta call in a shoplifter, the cops take
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

14.

CASHIER (cont'd)
forever. No way I get out of here
in time to meet the boys for the
game.

Something snaps in Chloe. This reminds her of her boyfriend.
But also just driving the last spike. Her boss. Jamie. This
guy. Finally just too much. She explodes. Picks up a two
liter of soda. Hits him in the face with it.

CHLOE
Fuck you! Fuck your game! Fuck your
stupid friends!

He stumbles. Drops the rope. She continues clobbering him.

JAMIE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)
Whoa! Whoa! That's enough freeing
the beast!

Chloe stops. Breathing heavy. Hair loosened. Feral.

CHLOE
(Into her phone)
He locked the door. I can't get
out.

22 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

22

JAMIE
No. I locked it. But it's unlocked
now. Get the rope and go.

23 EXT. STREET - EVENING

23

Chloe grabs the rope. Exits to the street.

CHLOE
Why would you lock the door on me,
you nutjob?!

JAMIE
Hey, now. No need for name calling!
Rude! Now head to the bus stop.
I'll be in touch.

CHLOE
Wait! Why did you lock the door on
me! Hey! Hey!

Jamie is gone. Chloe grunts in frustration. Begins walking
down the street. Accidentally bumps into somebody.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

15.

STRANGER CHLOE BUMPS INTO
Hey, watch where you're going.

CHLOE
(Grabs him, shakes his collar)
You watch where you're going!

She shoves him off. Continues down the street with purpose.

24 INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - NIGHT

24

The action between Monica and the Girl in Black resumes.

GIRL IN BLACK
Bring her back to life? That sounds
insane.

MONICA
Really? After all you've seen since
you got here?

GIRL IN BLACK
Well, I can't argue there.

MONICA
She's a friend of Bailey's too, if
that helps.

GIRL IN BLACK
Playing the Bailey card, huh?

MONICA
Don't believe me?
(Takes her phone out, taps it
a few times, hands it to the
Girl in Black)
Here are some pictures of them
together.

The Girl in Black looks at the phone, scrolling it some.
Seems a little clumsy in how she operates it.

GIRL IN BLACK
Does this model get better wi-fi
than the old ones?

MONICA
Usually. But the signal here...

GIRL IN BLACK
(A wistful smile)
Yep. That's Bailey.
(Gives the picture a last
look. A sense of something

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

16.

left behind. Then hands the
phone back to Monica.)
What do you want from me?

MONICA
There's a doctor here who's
developed a serum to raise the
dead.

GIRL IN BLACK
Here? Now? How do you make a serum
that raises the dead?

MONICA
Regenerative medicine gone wild, I
guess. Drugs. Herbs you gotta fight
Ninja monks for. Plastic tubes and
pots and pans...how should I know?!

GIRL IN BLACK
Well, I guess that explains the
mess you were in.

MONICA
Yep. Resurrection brings out the
crazies.

GIRL IN BLACK
Obviously.

MONICA
I thought I had a great plan.
Kidnap the doctor. Torture him.
He'd tell me where the serum is.
But nothing has worked. Not even
bullets to the kneecaps!

GIRL IN BLACK
Mr. Claude taught you well. That
piece of shit.

MONICA
Don't talk bad about him. He did a
lot for me.

GIRL IN BLACK
Shame that's how you see it.

MONICA
Can you just get the doctor to
talk? Please?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

17.

GIRL IN BLACK

Fine. Tell me where he is. And stay out of my way.

25 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

25

Jamie is working on the computer. Agent Scott enters.

AGENT SCOTT

Jo Anna called. She's worried that...

JAMIE

Whatever it is, I've thought of it. Trust me. But tell her I got the address.

AGENT SCOTT

The exact address? Where the girls are being kept? How'd you do that?

26 INT. GENERAL STORE - EVENING (FLASHBACK TO SCENE 19)

26

As the clerk exits the counter to go after Chloe, the shot stays on the register. It lights up when he is gone from the counter. Text on it: PURCHASE RECORDS...FILTER BY INVENTORY...BILLING ADDRESS MATCH...

27 INT. FBI SURVEILLANCE ROOM - EVENING

27

JAMIE

Eh, I could teach you but I'd have to charge. Go call Jo Anna and tell her I'll text the address when I get a second.

AGENT SCOTT

Get a second? What are you doing right now?

JAMIE

Hacking the electric company. Downloading blueprints. Routing a bus through red lights. Uploading thermal imaging software to some satellites. A few other odds and ends.

AGENT SCOTT

K...

Agent Scott turns and exits. Severely perplexed.

28 EXT. STREET WITH A BUS STOP - EVENING 28

Chloe walks toward a bus stop where a man sits.

JAMIE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)
Breaker one-nine, we got dogs loose
in the city.

CHLOE
(Puts phone to her ear)
Where do you go when you leave?

29 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING 29

The action intercuts between Jamie and Chloe.

JAMIE
Aw...miss me?

CHLOE
I'm almost to the bus stop.

JAMIE
I know you are. You see the guy
sitting there? He has a gun. You
need to steal it.

CHLOE
What do you have me doing?

JAMIE
Questions, Chloe, questions. Granny
go splat.

CHLOE
Screw you, psycho!

JAMIE
Saucy. Now, to get the gun, I want
you to...

CHLOE
Shut up. You'll just make it weird.
I got this.

Chloe disconnects the call.

JAMIE
She hung up on me! Nobody's ever
hung up on me.

30 EXT. PARK AREA - NIGHT 30

Monica sits on a bench. Twirls her phone then puts it away.

MONICA
So...bored.

CUT TO a wider shot. The Girl in Black behind Monica.
Holding a small box.

GIRL IN BLACK
Boo!

Monica jumps. Lets out a comical squeal. Turns around.

GIRL IN BLACK
(Holds up the box)
Your serum, you big weirdo.

MONICA
Cool. How bad did you have to mess
him up?

GIRL IN BLACK
Not at all. I just asked the good
doctor some questions. Seemingly
random chit chat. But really
fishing for details. For example,
all his favorite places...
restaurants, stores, stuff like
that, all in the same area. That
told me where he spent his time. So
I focused on that area.

MONICA
Right. Like...algorithms.

GIRL IN BLACK
Exactly. Just math and pattern
recognition. See...violence is not
always the answer, kids.

MONICA
Violence is cool. Nerd. But,
whatever.
(Opens the box. Furrows her
brow.)
Is this...

GIRL IN BLACK
It's one dose. And that's it.

31 EXT. STREET WITH A BUS STOP - EVENING 31

Chloe at the bus stop. Sits down next to the man.

CHLOE
I'd thought the bus would have been
here already.

MAN ON BENCH
Yeah, it's running really late for
some reason.

Chloe gives a grin. Then lets her eyes wander to the gun.

CHLOE
Oh, your gun. My dad used to have
one kind of like it. Taught me how
to shoot with it. Wow, it's always
nice to be reminded of him.

MAN ON BENCH
Oh? He's no longer with us?

CHLOE
Five years next month.

MAN ON BENCH
I'm sorry to hear that.

CHLOE
Could I see it? Just for old time's
sake?

MAN ON BENCH
Sure. Good man...
(Hands the gun to her)
Teaching his girl to take care of
herself.

CHLOE

He did try to teach me to take care of myself. But somewhere along the way, I guess I forgot a lot of his lessons. For no real reason either. Just happened. Wherever he is, I hope he's not too disappointed in what I've let myself become.

MAN ON BENCH
I'm sure he's not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

21.

CHLOE
(Looking at the gun)
Somebody's always trying to take
these away, huh?

MAN ON BENCH
Yeah. It sucks.

CHLOE
(Aims the gun at him)
It certainly does. For you.

MAN ON BENCH
What are you...

CHLOE
I've never used one of these
before. Dad did have one. But I was
so scared of it. First thing I
remember being afraid of. Just the
idea of using one, I should be
shaking like crazy. But, hey, I'm
not. Because I'm just DONE being
scared.

MAN ON BENCH
Young lady, that is a dangerous
weapon in the hands of someone who
doesn't know how to use it.

CHLOE
And yet so easy to get my untrained
hands on it. Move one inch and I
pull this trigger. Or maybe I'm
just bluffing. Wanna find out?

He knows he can't try anything. She stands. Backs away.

32 EXT. PARK AREA - NIGHT

32

The action between Monica and the Girl in Black resumes.

GIRL IN BLACK
I did algorithms on you, too. I'm
from where you're from, so it's
much easier. Mr. Claude is dead. If
the serum works, you could take it
back with you and use it bring him
back to life.

MONICA
You got all that from me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

22.

GIRL IN BLACK

Use the dose I gave you to save
your friend. Or a man who dragged
you through pitch-black evil. You
choose.

MONICA

What do your algorithms tell you
I'm going to do?

GIRL IN BLACK

Honestly, I'm not sure. But I hope
you're not beyond doing the right
thing. Now. And in the future. I
hope you know you don't have to
stay in the dark.

MONICA

(Looking down at the box,
mourning, loss, and agony in
her voice)
You don't understand. I just...

Monica looks up. The Girl in Black gone. Monica alone with
her choice.

33 EXT. STREET WITH A BUS STOP - EVENING 33

Chloe rounds a corner. Pulls her phone out. Speaks into it.

CHLOE

You there?

34 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING 34

The action intercuts between Jamie and Chloe.

JAMIE

Yeah, I'm here. Good job, Chloe.
Hang in there. Three blocks north.
I'll text you the address.

CHLOE

I'm gonna finish this because I
started it. But If you hurt my
grandmother, I promise I will...

JAMIE

I was never going to hurt her.

CHLOE

O.K., then. Hey...tell me your
name.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

23.

JAMIE

Jamie. My name is Jamie. And speaking of names, I understand you work with a guy named Reggie.

CHLOE

Ugh...yeah. What about him?

JAMIE

It turns out he's texted many inappropriate comments about a...Ms. Butler to some of his friends. I just sent those texts to Ms. Butler.

CHLOE

Is that right? Thanks, Jamie.

35 EXT. HOUSE IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA - EVENING

35

The door to a house opens. Chloe exits. Holding the gun. Sits it on a porch table. Gets her phone. Speaks into it.

CHLOE

How much longer?

JAMIE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)

FBI is a minute out. You did great Chloe.

36 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

36

Jamie sits in front of her computer. A flashback to what went on inside the house from Jamie's perspective.

JAMIE

O.K. Chloe. They're coming for you. Three of them. So I'm cutting the lights in three..two... one... zero. They can't see shit now, but I've got you on thermal imaging. So I'm your eyes. Strike them with the butt of the gun on my count. Then tie them up with the rope. We're almost done, Chloe. Don't be scared.

CHLOE (VO, THROUGH COMPUTER)

(Her voice full of confidence)
I'm not.

24.

37 EXT. HOUSE IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA - EVENING 37

Back to Chloe waiting on the porch.

JAMIE (VO, THROUGH PHONE)
Totally badass. Doing all that in
the dark.

CHLOE
The lights were out. But I wasn't
in the dark.

38 INT. FBI INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING 38

Jamie sits alone. After a few beats, Jo Anna enters.

JO ANNA
(This is hard on her)
Thank you.

JAMIE
Glad I could help.

JO ANNA
You're right. We should find
Monica. But I'll need you available
to work with me. So you're not
going to prison.

JAMIE
Then where am I going?

JO ANNA
I assume you've heard of Donaldson
Tech?

JAMIE
Of course. About the only
corporation not doing the devil's
work.

JO ANNA
Interesting word choice. Not doing
the devil's work. You'll find out
that's literally true. I hope you
don't frighten easily.

25.

39

INT. A LONG HALLWAY - NIGHT

39

An empty hallway. Jamie enters. Another door opens. A young woman comes out of it with a duffel bag. This is BAILEY, which suggests a connection to Monica's storyline.

JAMIE

Hey, Bailey. How's my favorite masked vigilante?

BAILEY

Eh, don't remind me. We need a Jesus girl on the streets, I get the call. Big fun.

(Reaches into duffel bag.
Pulls out an updated, more modern Jesus Girl mask.)
Oh by the way, this is for you.

JAMIE

What?

BAILEY

You said you could fix the comm gear on this one.

Takes the mask from Bailey. CLOSE-UP of the mask in Jamie's hand.

JAMIE

Oh, yeah. I'll work on it tonight. You know, when I'm not extracting five operatives at a time.

BAILEY

Cool. Oh. And Riley said not to leave your food wrappers all over the place.

JAMIE

Ugh...he is one fussy old fart.

BAILEY

What is it they tell me Cara used to say? It's Paul Riley's world. We're all just living in it.

JAMIE

That's crazy that you knew her. Like, grew up with her. But she still...

26.

40 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK TO SCENE 10) 40

A replay of action between Monica and the Girl in Black.

GIRL IN BLACK

Diet Mountain Dew, huh? I think you
mean Sugar Free Mountain Dew.
That's what they call it. Now.

We hear a man's voice, revealing the Girl in Black's name.

MAN'S VOICE (OS)

Cara, could you hurry up, please?

GIRL IN BLACK (AKA CARA)

Oh, Paul, you know you love me more
when I make you wait.

41 INT. A LONG HALLWAY - NIGHT 41

Back to Jamie and Bailey.

BAILEY

It's just physics. That's all time
travel is. Cara got sent back to
1983. Decided to stay there. Made a
life there. Simple as that.

JAMIE

What they say she did at the end...
if you guys weren't all super
secret, she'd have her own holiday.

BAILEY

It's my fault she even got mixed up
in all this. She didn't know about
any of it. We were just out one
night and...lesson one: What we do,
somebody you love pays a price
eventually.

(Tries to lighten the mood)
But I do NOT blame myself that she
got the hots for Riley. Eww...

JAMIE

Eh, maybe he was all cool and suave
back then. Not..."don't leave stuff
all over the place, Jamie!"

BAILEY

He tells himself she went out
saving the world. But it's no
consolation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

27.

JAMIE
(Looking at the mask)
Saving the world. Tough act to
follow. No wonder nobody else has
any luck with this thing.

BAILEY
I guess it just needs to find its
way to whoever it's meant for next.

Jamie nods casually. Then moves to a door. Opens it to
reveal a surveillance room. Enters the room. Alone inside
now. Sits in a chair, settles in, the mask next to her.

42 INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

42

A YOUNG WOMAN sits in an interrogation room. Two detectives,
a MALE DETECTIVE and a FEMALE DETECTIVE are in the room with
her. The two detectives look her over, then trade a glance
with each other.

MALE DETECTIVE
Sounds like bullshit to me.

FEMALE DETECTIVE
Yep.

YOUNG WOMAN
Just go check it out. You'll see.

FEMALE DETECTIVE
I'll look into it.

The female detective exits, leaving the Young Woman with the
Male Detective. She looks at a coffee pot in the room.

YOUNG WOMAN
Can I get a cup of that coffee?

MALE DETECTIVE
Sure.

He moves to the coffee pot. Pouring her a cup of coffee. As
his back is to her, she quietly and discretely taps on her
watch about three times.

43 INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

43

Jamie sits at the bank of computers and monitors. Knitting.
One of the screens lights up with text: *Alert - Seattle.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

28.

JAMIE
Seattle, huh? O.K. Show me what you
got Seattle?

She hits a button on the computer. Surveillance camera
footage of the Young Woman and the Male Detective in the
interrogation room comes up.

JAMIE
Alright...I've got eyes and ears on
you, Seattle. Sit the coffee cup
down if you can hear me.

The Young Woman sits the cup down.

JAMIE
Good. Now, say a number to give me
an estimate on how long until they
check your cover story.

YOUNG WOMAN
That is one good cup of coffee.

JAMIE
One minute? Are you serious,
Seattle?

YOUNG WOMAN
Yes indeed, definitely one...good
cup of coffee.

JAMIE
Great. O.K. Be ready for extraction
scenario 16-23-4-2 if things go
crazy. Facial recognition I.D.'s
your cover story protocol as
4-8-1-5. Take a sip of coffee if
that's correct.

The Young Woman takes a sip of coffee.

JAMIE
Alright, Seattle. Buckle up. Here
we go.

Jamie begins hurriedly typing on a computer.

END

Appendix B – Character Bios and Similar Characters

Biographical overview/similar characters – Jamie Shaw

Jamie was born in 1993 and, for most of her life, was raised by a single father, Patrick Shaw. She really has no memories of her mother, who died when Jamie was still a toddler. She does, though, remember knocking on her parents' door one morning and wondering why it took so long for her father to answer and why he wouldn't let her come in. She later came to realize that her mother was dead inside the room and her father didn't want her to see what had happened.

For reasons that were never clear to Jamie growing up, her father (an attorney) became increasingly involved with the mob and other shady characters, ultimately gaining a reputation as a kind of "fixer" for bad people who had gotten in trouble. This led to a life of upper middle-class privilege for Jamie (bordering on wealth), but she was also never comfortable with how her father made his money. And the fact that he didn't seem like a bad person, in fact quite the opposite, only confused her more. Through her father's association with the mafia, she met Monica Drake when both were children. Monica was kind of the "ward" of a mob leader, Mr. Claude, and Jamie bonded with her over both feeling kind of detached from what their father/father figures did for business.

Jamie demonstrated extreme intelligence and proficiency with computers at an early age and by 2003 was beginning to dabble in hacking. Through this, she drew the attention of a mysterious figure who went by the moniker of "T." She has, to date, never met "T" in person, knowing him/her as only a cyber presence. But "T" clearly had advanced levels of technological knowledge and became something of a mentor to Jamie. She learned her methodology from him. But she also became uncomfortable with his methods fairly early on and their relationship has been strained through most of her teenage and young adult years. Their relationship is analogous to that of Batman/Bruce Wayne and Ra's Al Ghul.

As Jamie entered her early adult years, she and Monica began to diverge on their paths a bit. Monica became more involved in the mob, while Jamie became more of a tech vigilante. Jamie hid her actions from Monica, although Monica ultimately knew more than she was letting on. By her early 20s, Jamie had gained quite a reputation (albeit an anonymous one) as a world-class hacker who was quite the thorn in the side of authorities. Finally, authorities caught up to her in 2016 and she was arrested. But Monica used her mob connections to get Jamie out of jail and the two then faked Jamie's death. After two years in hiding, Jamie emerged because Monica was missing. She turned herself in to the FBI (and provided them valuable intel on a case) in exchange for their help in finding Monica. Through this encounter, she is sent to work with a clandestine vigilante group that also deals with supernatural phenomenon. Through this experience, she will learn her mother's true identity, the circumstances of her mother's death, and begin her journey toward becoming a masked vigilante superhero called Jesus Girl.

Similar characters to Jamie in other media include Harold Finch from *Person of Interest*, Felicity Smoak from *Arrow*, Barbara Gordon/Oracle from the *Batman* comics, the mysterious hacker from the Black Mirror episode "Shut Up and Dance," Lily Rush from *Cold Case*, and Sydney Bristow from *Alias*.

Biographical overview/similar characters – Chloe Caper

Chloe was born in 1988 and raised primarily in the suburbs of Philadelphia. She was raised in a generally conservative family and this had both positive and negative effects on her personality and character development. On the one hand, she was taught a series of generally good values – being polite and respectful, respecting authority, being helpful to others, etc. On the other hand, though, she was probably brought up to adhere to somewhat traditional, outdated gender roles. As such, the more she was thrust into a “man’s world,” the harder she perhaps found it to assert her own identity.

That is not to say she was raised to be a 50s housewife, far from it. As her father’s only daughter, he certainly wanted her to be capable of doing anything she wanted in life. And he wanted her to see herself as equal to anyone. Particularly as his health worsened during a long and brutal bout with cancer, he wanted to be sure he imparted any and all wisdom he could to Chloe before he was gone. And, while this was a well-intentioned attempt to be helpful, it was also difficult for Chloe. She wanted to treasure her last days with her father and wanted to focus on easing his pain, while he seemed at times to be trying to do a lifetime of parenting in a matter of months.

And her father’s illness and death coincided with what should have been a time of self-discovery and autonomy for Chloe. In addition to losing a parent far too soon, she also lost out on some precious years of finding herself and figuring out how to navigate an adult world. She mourned most closely with her grandmother, her father’s mother, and the two became even closer because of his death. To each of their minds, the other is all they have left of Chloe’s father.

Prior to her father’s illness disrupting her life, Chloe was finding some early successes in business and industry. She completed an MBA and began work in corporate America. But her career was stunted during her father’s illness and she found that not only had things passed her by a little, but she had also lost professional momentum. So, as she hit 30, she was sort of stuck in a kind of “just below middle management” rut. She was the kind of employee who was capable but unnoticeable.

She also wasn’t very good at touting her own worth, so her successes generally weren’t acknowledged while her failures seemed to be archived forever. And, for others around her, the opposite seemed true: Their failures were glossed over and even sometimes framed as successes. This kind of double standard had become so much a part of Chloe’s professional life that she was kind of too numb to fight it anymore. These patterns also found themselves manifesting themselves in her personal life, as she settled into a relationship with a jerk mostly because she was kind of unclear in her own mind how to extract herself from it.

Similar characters to Chloe in other media include Paul Hackett from *After Hours*, Roberta Glass from *Desperately Seeking Susan*, Rebecca Howe from *Cheers*, Rachel Green from *Friends*, and Rory Gilmore from *Gilmore Girls*.

Biographical overview/similar characters – Monica Drake

Monica was born in 1992 to a mother who worked as a prostitute. Her early childhood was extremely unsettling and dangerous, as her mother would routinely take Monica on her “dates” and leave her waiting outside hotel rooms to hear and witness all kinds of awful things. During one such encounter in 1997, while waiting in the hall outside a hotel room, she saw a bloody woman leaving a hotel room. Curious, she investigated and realized the woman had attempted to kill a middle-aged man, mob boss Mr. Claude. Through Monica’s intervention, Mr. Claude was saved. After that, Mr. Claude took an interest in her. When he realized the conditions she was living in with her mother, he became extremely upset and essentially blackmailed and threatened Monica’s mother into giving him custody of her. Her mother was allowed to stay in her life tangentially, but for all intents and purposes, Monica was raised by Mr. Claude from that point on.

Like many mob scions, her early resistance to his lifestyle gave way to gradually falling into the “family business.” For Monica, though, it wasn’t so much about the lure of the mob lifestyle, but an appreciation for everything Mr. Claude had done for her and, because of that, a refusal to see him and his business for the evil that it was. Being raised in such an environment led Monica to develop an overly aggressive, even bullying personality. As the most privileged of groups of privileged children she grew up with, she asserted herself as the Queen Bee. This included bullying the daughter of a prominent U.S. Senator whose father had been causing problems for Mr. Claude. This girl was Cara Montgomery.

As she became more involved in Mr. Claude’s business, she learned that he had mixed the mob with supernatural elements. As such, his was a doubly dangerous outfit. This also provided Monica with a growing knowledge of the supernatural and when Mr. Claude was murdered in 2017, she began to investigate supernatural and pseudoscientific ways to bring him back to life.

During this time, Monica was also helping her best friend, Jamie, stay on the run from the FBI and running the mob in Mr. Claude’s absence. When her research revealed that the Russians had identified and attempted to steal a serum to raise the dead in the 80s, she learned to time travel so she could go get it and bring it back with her. By then, a close friend of hers’ had also died. So she saw the opportunity to save two lives. She took her friend’s body back as a test case because Mr. Claude’s body could possibly be identified by adversaries he had in the 80s. When she returned to the 80s, she had trouble finding the serum. But she did her research before she left. She knew that her old childhood adversary, Cara, had herself become involved in time travel and was now living in the 80s. Further, Cara had become a prominent crime fighter. As such, she became the perfect potential ally in Monica’s efforts to get her hands on the serum she needed. So she sought out Cara in the 80s.

Similar characters to Monica in other media include Nyssa al Ghul from *Arrow*, Michael Corleone from *The Godfather* series, Veronica Lodge and Cheryl Blossom from *Riverdale*, and Faith Lehane from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Biographical overview/similar characters – Cara Montgomery

Cara was born in 1993. Her father is an influential, long-serving U.S. Senator with borderline Presidential aspirations. Indeed, one thing that hindered his political aspirations was the “wild child” reputation Cara developed. By her early 20s, Cara was the celebrity/child of famous parents bad girl of the day. This made it all the more sensational an event when she mysteriously went missing in 2015.

Cara grew up a fairly nice girl, but was kind of neglected because her father was so busy. She bonded with another similarly tragic “rich kid” Senator’s daughter, Bailey Jefferson. By her teens, though, Cara began to dabble in drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with not only her father’s neglect, but also having to be subjected to negative opinions about him being reflected on her. For example, when her father made trouble for a mob boss (because the mob boss wasn’t bribing him enough), the mob boss’s surrogate daughter began bullying Cara. Acting out” became her way of dealing with a variety of unique pressures. She had also lost touch with Bailey, so she missed Bailey’s calming influence.

She reconnected with Bailey, though, in 2014. This was helpful to Cara as she was starting to come to her wit’s end with the whole party girl thing. She was a borderline drug addict by this point whose genius intellect and particular aptitude for science and math was being squandered. She had gone from a girl who wanted to be the next Dana Scully to a punch line on late night talk shows.

What Cara did not know was that Bailey had become involved in a clandestine demon fighting organization. One night while the two were out, a group of demons, time traveling from the 80s, attacked Bailey. Cara proved to have a kind of unforeseen mettle as she fought off the demons, saving Bailey’s life. But she was taken back to the 80s with the demons as they escaped. She was found unconscious in a park by Carly Allen, a lawyer by day and masked vigilante by night. Carly took Cara in and, because she was a member of the same organization Bailey would be a member of thirty years later, had no problems believing or understanding Cara’s time travel. Carly wanted to send Cara back to her own time. But Cara found the slower pace of life in the 80s freeing. Her old addictions and bad habits were gone, as were the lights of negative fame, and she was afraid if she returned home, she would fall victim to her old vices. In the 80s, she felt like she could do something good with her life again.

She became best friends with Carly and even joined the demon hunting group Carly worked with. Carly was the original Jesus Girl, a masked vigilante from the 80s. Eventually, Cara would take over the persona when Carly was injured or unavailable. During this time, Cara also became attracted to Paul Riley, a young up and comer in the demon hunting organization. And while Cara was one of only three women Paul could ever say he loved, his affections were ultimately reserved for Carly. Cara found herself the odd woman out in that triangle.

But in the early 90s she met Patrick Shaw and the two fell in love. Cara became pregnant but was unable to carry a baby to term. Patrick, a fledgling attorney, did legal work for a bioengineering company who was conducting fertility experiments. The company offered to trial one of its

procedures on Cara. She figured, what did she have to lose? But when she awoke she was told the baby could not be saved after all. She was devastated but took the doctors at their word.

What she did not know was that, in fact, her unborn child was taken from her and preserved as a “DNA bank” for clones that had been made of Cara. Patrick found out what had happened and tried to rescue his child, but was framed by his bosses. Cara and her friends believed Patrick had been in on the whole scheme, when in fact he hadn’t. But he was able to rescue his unborn child with the help of one of the “Cara clones” (who had no way of understanding she was not the “real” Cara). The two escaped together and raised the child together for about two years before the Cara clone died, leaving Patrick a single father to the child, a daughter named Jamie.

Similar characters to Cara in other media include Eleven in *Stranger Things*, Tracy McConnell/The Mother in *How I Met Your Mother*, Cordelia Chase in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Cameron Howe in *Halt and Catch Fire*, and Jen Lindley in *Dawson’s Creek*.

Appendix C - Wardrobe Notes for Characters

Jamie wardrobe notes

1. Two wardrobes total (main wardrobe and one for end scene)
2. Needs to sort of suggest/foreshadow Cara's costume. Primarily through color, but also perhaps something in/on hair that simulates mask?
3. For possible hair ideas: Buffy pics, Barbara Gordon as Oracle, general mid/late 90s hairstyles, maybe even flashback Felicity.
4. Clark Kent/Smallville and use of blue and red in wardrobe for ideas on how to use color (red and black) in Jamie's wardrobes.
5. Shoes? Some kind of tennis shoes/canvas fine in main scene. Maybe something a little more "boot" in last scene...again to foreshadow costume.
6. Primary wardrobe also 90s influenced (plaid, baggy, etc. but more grunge aesthetic or Buffy aesthetic than, say, *Friends* or 90s pop stars.
7. Color/style links to Cara's wardrobe.

Chloe wardrobe notes

1. Hair needs to be made more unkempt as action goes along. Start in ponytail? Combed/styled very precise...becomes more frazzled? (As we discussed, the combed/goes frazzled option is probably best for you)
2. One wardrobe. Issues to consider: Needs to be comfortable/practical to do a lot of physical action in (flats as opposed to any heel, are pants/slacks better than skirt?)
3. Needs to be professional/business casual but also reflect a young (late 20s, early 30s at oldest) woman's contemporary workplace attire. In fact, the more contemporary it is...the more it can contrast the "80s look" of the time travel stuff (and Jamie's 90s influenced wardrobe)
4. Colors: Needs to be some kind of thematic relationship or contrast to Monica's colors (since they are both mirror and opposite in their respective storylines).
5. Chloe's color scheme like Monica's? Specifically complementary colors? Different shades of colors?
6. EX: Monica darker blues, Chloe lighter blues both for contrast and to reflect nature of characters? Chloe in warms Monica in cools?
7. Maybe good to avoid red both because the color's psychology doesn't match Chloe's personality and to avoid too much red (Jamie and Cara probably heavy on the reds)
8. Is there a way for the wardrobe to "change" toward the end? Shedding sweater/jacket? Just lighting/filters to alter her coloration as her personality evolves? (We probably can do this kind of thing with the blouse tucked/untucked or messed up as we talked about today...or if you had blazer, start buttoned gets unbuttoned, off shoulder, etc.)

Monica wardrobe notes

- 1- A more intimidating/powerful look in general. Hair longer? Hair obscures face some to reflect a kind of hidden true nature and Monica's underworld connections?
- 2- Mob colors? Black and tan/brown to hint at colors of mob movie posters? Monica in black too much black since it's a part of Cara's wardrobe? **(As we said, this might not be practical with other colors in the story)**
- 3- Maybe a navy blue instead of black? Navy/white monotone? Purple to sort of hint at her higher social status? Sees herself as royalty? Purple also associated with magic so that could work. **(Since that's a color you like, and it fits something with the character, we can certainly work toward making this Monica's signature color...something she has in each wardrobe)**
- 4- Probably no red definitely (even though it's a good crime color) since Jamie and Cara both rely heavily on red.
- 5- Four wardrobes total (graveyard, convenience store, night Cara rescues her, night Cara gives her the serum).
- 6- They should probably all get a little lighter/warmer to reflect Monica's evolution. Last wardrobe should have the lightest/warmest colors.
- 7- Fashion sense can be contemporary since she's come directly from present day. In fact, avoiding any retro vibe could serve to hide the time travel element from the audience.
- 8- Maybe the coat at graveyard is a visual identifier of her darkness. Maybe she doesn't have it in last scene or takes it off while waiting for Cara to symbolize emerging from the darkness a little? Maybe has it on her lap. Sits the medical container on it. Attaching the serum to the darkness and to her...visually representing her moral choice.
- 9- I don't know if we talked about shoes specifically, if there is a fairly plain/common pair, we could probably use them for all wardrobes. Casual and comfortable.

Appendix D - Links to Playlists of Songs for Actresses

Link to Cara playlist

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtSc-2e5-PqOBDIYnEo_yqKOpEbm93s-p

Link to Monica playlist

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtSc-2e5-PqM7LaVhqggNV3KPNTjKmRhy>

Link to Jamie playlist

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtSc-2e5-PqPTDmOMqXo_14wsU8pZkITF

Link to Chloe playlist

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtSc-2e5-PqPbq-CasAMKHCG5JRiE_1SP

